BROWNING

Selected Poems



ROBERT BROWNING

SELECT POEMS

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1

Life and Works of Browning

Birth and Parentage

Robert Browning was born in the comparatively rural parish of Camberwell on May 7, 1812. His father was a clerk in the Bank of England. He was a man of more than ordinary culture and originality of mind, who possessed a library of six thousand volumes. The poet's mother was a Scotch. The poet's upbringing was somewhat narrow. He went to no public school and to no university. Till the age of fourteen he remained at a school for young gentlemen, run by a Mr. Ready at Peckham, after which he was placed under the care of a private tutor. When he was seventeen, he went for a term to a Greek class at University College, Gower Street. The systematic use of his father's admirable library was probably the most important factor in the poet's early education. Whilst still a mere boy, he read the great Elizabethans and Byron with special delight ; and when he was only fourteen, his good, loving, religious minded mother brought him from London (at his request) the works of Shelley, adding, at the suggestion of the bookseller, those of Keats—poets whose fame does not appear to have previously penetrated into the rustic retreats of Camberwell and Peckham.

Formative Influences : His Choice

The most striking fact in Browning's youth is, perhaps, the way in which at the age of seventeen or eighteen he made up his mind that he would make poetry his career and his profession. Influenced by Byron, and afterwards still more strongly by Shelley, he deliberately chose, and without any important hesitation adhered to, this lofty election. What is almost more strange is that his choice had the entire approval of his father, which is alone sufficient to mark off the elder Browning as no ordinary bank clerk.

'Pauline' : Browning's First Published Poem

During the year 1832, at the age of twenty, the young poet wrote his first printed poem—*Pauline : a Fragment of a Confession,* which was published in January 1833. It showed the influence of Shelley. but not by way of mere imitation. "The blank verse is a little stiff, but the language is almost free from the oddities of structure

which mark the later poems" (**Ryland**). *The Athenaeum* spoke of it in terms of high praise: *The Literary Gazette* described it as a "dreamy volume without an object, and unfit for publication". In *the Monthly Repository*, edited by the poet's friends, Mr. Fox, a cultivated dissenting minister, it received a warm welcome.

The Journey to Russia

Browning's literary labours were laid aside for a short time during the winter of 1833-4, when he made a three months' journey to Russia, in company with the Russian Consul-General. This seems to have turned his thoughts to diplomacy, and he applied, unsuccessfully, for an appointment in a mission to Persia. He was back in London in 1834, and began contributing to *the Monthly Repository* some short pieces, several of which now appear in his collected works.

'Paracelsus' and 'Strafford': Failure as a Dramatist

Next year he published *Paracelsus*, a poem in dramatic form, though in no real sense a drama. Like so many of his works, it is a study of the development of character, and it shows a great advance on its predecessor. It was favourably reviewed by John Forster, afterwards the biographer of Dickens, in *the New Monthly Magazine*, and the young poet soon obtained the acquaintance of some of the most important members of the literary society of the day, amongst whom were Serjeant Talfourd, Leigh Hunt, Barry Cornwall (Procter), Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton), Dickens, Landor, and Wordsworth. Macready, the popular actor and theatrical manager, asked him to write a tragedy; and in May 1837 *Strafford* was produced at Drury Lane, and ran for a few nights. It has been customary to speak of this and other pieces written by Browning for the stage as, at any rate, conditional successes. They were, it is confessed, never played for more than a few nights, but they were extremely applauded, and their withdrawal is ascribed to some extraneous circumstance, the jealousy of actors, or some such cause. "There is no need, however, to try to explain away what is, on the face of it, perfectly evident, that Browning's plays are without the particular qualities which make for success on the boards. The tragedy was withdrawn after five nights" (**Ryland**).

Two Popular Poems

In the spring of 1838, he went by sea to Venice, and on the voyage wrote two poems, which are among the most popular of his productions. They are: *How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix* and *Home Thoughts from the Sea.*

Sordello: Its Obscurity

His next important work was *Sordello* (1840), a poem in 6000 lines of heroic couplet. It is acknowledged on all hands to be the most difficult among his works, and presents, in the fullest development, the least estimable features of his style. Everyone knows how

Tennyson is said to have declared that there were only two lines in it which he understood. Carlyle affirmed that Mrs. Carlyle had read it through without being able to tell whether Sordello were a man, a city, or a book.

'Pippa Passes' : 'Bells and Pomegranates'

In the following year, 1841, appeared *Pippa Passes*, a delightful work, which in its main outlines is as clear as *Sordello* is indefinite. "The dramatic shape of the work is only a matter of form ; the plot is altogether wanting in unity, and the stories of which it is composed are left half told ; but some of the characters are superbly drawn, and it is full of thrilling human interest" (*Ryland*). It was issued as No. 1 of a series of volumes of poetry to be called *Bells and Pomegranates*, sixteen double-columned pages of close print for six pence. Later volumes were increased in number of pages and raised in price. In rapid succession appeared other poems of the series : *King Victor and King Charles* (1842) ; *Dramatic Lyrics*, which included *Cavalier Tunes, My Last Duchess, Johannes Agricola, The Pied Piper*, etc, (1842) ; *The Return of the Druses* (1843) ; *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon* (1843) ; *Colombe's Birthday* (1844). *The Blot in the 'Scutcheon* was a three-Act tragedy produced by Macready at Drury Lane. The poet and the manager quarrelled over it ; and Browning thought that not enough had been done to ensure its success. Yet, according to Browning, "if applause means success, the play thus maimed and maltreated was successful enough". Phelps, who, with Miss Helen Faucit, had taken the leading part in it, revived it in 1848 at Sadler's Wells, again with applause. Yet it only ran a few nights. *Colombe's Birthday* was not put on the stage till April 1853, when Miss Faucit produced it at the Haymarket.

Dramatic Romances and Lyrics

In the autumn of 1844, Browning paid his second visit to Italy. Next year he published the seventh number of *Bells and Pomegranates*—the admirable volume called *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845). This, like the *Dramatic Lyrics* of 1842 consisted of short poems, and included many of those most frequently reprinted in selections,—*e.g.*, *The Italian in England, The Englishman in Italy, The Tomb at St. Praxed's, The Lost Leader, Pictor Ignotus, Home Thoughts From Abroad.*

Marriage : The Poet Settles in Italy

It was in 1845 that Browning met his future wife, Elizabeth Moulton Barrett (1806-1861), herself a poet of high rank, known already as the author of *The Seraphim*, 1838, and *Poems*, 1844.

She was a very delicate woman, who spent most of her life on a sofa. Her father had discouraged a more active life : he had apparently made up his mind that she must die ; and was unwilling to allow her to marry or to travel for her health. He said afterwards of

Browning : "I have no objection to the young man, but my daughter should have been thinking of another world !" It was useless to hope that he would ever consent to the marriage, and the two were secretly married at Marylebone Parish Church on September, 12, 1846. A few days afterwards they left England together. Not even the remarkable improvement in Mrs. Browning's health and her perfect happiness would reconcile this unnatural parent to the marriage. The two poets went to live their almost ideal life at Florence, where, after some changes, they settled down in the old palace known as Casa Guidi. Here their only child, the painter, Robert Barrett Browning was born in 1849.

'Luria' and 'A Soul's Tragedy', Published !

In the year of his marriage Browning published the eighth and last number of *Bells and Pomegranates*, containing two of the most popular and beautiful of his longer poems, *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy*. In 1850, followed *Christmas Eve* and *Easter Day* and two poems which deal with the Judgment and Resurrection and other Christian beliefs in a novel way, but in no sceptical spirit.

'Men and Women' : The Poet at the Fullness of His Powers

It was not till 1855 that Browning published his next work, *Men and Women*, a collection of short pieces of the same type as *the Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. In this he reached perhaps his highest level of sustained achievement. A more wonderful gallery of soul-pictures has never been produced. Artists, musicians, philosophers, statesmen, lovers and men of the world uneveil their characters, as it were unconsciously. Nothing more picturesque, more incisive, more full of insight into character, has ever been written.

Death of Mrs. Browning : The Poet Returns to London

In 1861, Mrs. Browning died, and was buried among her beloved Florentines. Her husband came to live in London, and for many years occupied a house in Warwick Crescent.

'Dramatis Personae'

His next volume, which was called *Dramatis Personae*, 1864, belonged to the same type as its immediate predecessor, and showed no falling off in the poet's powers. *James Lee's Wife*, *A Death in the Desert*. *Caliban upon Setebos*, *Abt Vogler* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra* were included in it.

Fame and Recognition

Up to the present, Browning had never been a popular poet. He had some admirers, and among these admirers were some of the most illustrious literary men of the day. "But the general public stood aloof, and looked on him as too eccentric and too obscure to be taken seriously, and even critics of the highest standing and the greatest

breadth of view regarded him without enthusiasm. What his position was may be understood from the fact that Henri Taine, in his very fresh and modern *History of English Literature* (1863-64), does not even mention him. Mrs. Browning is praised, but her husband is passed over in silence (**Ryland**). The turning-point had come, however, and to this the new edition of his poems, 1868, and the publication of a volume of selections, made with considerable judgment, 1872, no doubt, contributed. In June 1867, the University of Oxford conferred on him by diploma the degree of M.A., and he was elected to an honorary fellowship at Balliol College in the October of the same year. Next year, on the death of John Stuart Mill, he was offered a nomination to the Lord Rectorship of the University of St. Andrews, and **Mrs Orr** speaks of the offer as virtually guaranteeing his election. If so much unanimity among the students was assured, it speaks eloquently of his growing fame.

"The Ring and the Book" : a Unique Achievement

That fame was largely increased by the publication, in the years 1868-69, of *the Ring and the Book*, which *the Athenaeum* welcomed as the greatest poetic achievement of the time, and the most profound spiritual treasure that England had produced since the days of Shakespeare. It consisted of four volumes of blank verse, containing over 21,000 lines, in which the same story of murder, treachery, and meanness is presented in detail from different points of view. It is marred by sameness and by inordinate verbosity. The child-wife Pompilia tells her story in much the same language as her elderly and wicked husband, Count Guido, and the young Canon Caponsacchi, and all talk a good deal more like Robert Browning than any other human creature before or since. "The unhappy plan renders much vain repetition inevitable ; but, besides this, every page is full of unnecessary digressions and parentheses. In spite of all this and of the want of directly presented movement, the poem never fails to command interest and admiration" (**Ryland**).

Decay of the Poet's Powers

From this point forward, Browning's position as a poet was fully established, and the growth in popular estimation only kept pace with the greater respect paid to him by leaders of literary opinion. Yet what he wrote after *the Ring and the Book*, though amounting to almost as much again as his hitherto published works, can scarcely be said to have added to his reputation. Much of it is as good as all but the best of his earlier work, but he strikes no new note. The poet had nothing new to say, his "message" was already fully delivered.

Some Later Poems : 'Asolando'

It is not necessary to dwell on any volume published after 1870. *Balaustion's Adventure* and *Prince Hohenstiel Schwangau* appeared in 1871 ; the former is a transcription of *the Alcestis* of Euripides with an

introduction, the latter an "appreciation", in the technical sense, of the character of Napoleon III. *Fifine at the Fair*, 1872, and *Red Cotton Nightcap Country*, 1873, *Pacchiarotto and other Poems*, 1876, *La Saisiaz*, 1878, *Dramatic Idyls* (two series 1879 and 1880). *Jocoseria*, 1883, *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day*, 1887, were the chief of those that followed. The volumes of 1876, 1879, 1880, 1883 and 1889 belonged to the same category as those of 1855 and 1864, they were mainly collections of short poems of dramatic self-revelation, mingled with lyrics. This last volume called *Asolando* (with a play on the name of the little town of Asolo in the Venetian territory at which it was written), published in 1889, when he was 77, contains work as full of force and vitality as the best of its predecessors.

Last Years and Death

Browning's later life was spent chiefly in London, with usually one or two trips to France or Italy every year. He was the centre of an admiring group of friends and an adoring crowd of disciples, and he enjoyed with dignity and self-respect the homage offered to him. "Like his friend Tennyson, he had not the pain of feeling that his force was abated ; both had the secret of renewing their youth" **(Ryland)**.

The end came at Venice, after a long visit to Asolo. His son had just read the telegram from the publishers, announcing the triumphant success of *Asolando*, when the brave and noble old man fell into his last sleep, on the night of December 12. 1889. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

2

The Themes of Browning

Or

The Main Subjects of Browning's Poetry

Or

Browning As A Poet of Art

Browning's Themes : Their Wide Range and Variety

Browning's interests were wide and varied, but primarily he was a poet of Man. His business was, "soul-dissection". As he tells us in *the Preface to Sordello*, his, "stress lay on the incidents in the develop-ment of the soul", and that remained the main subject of his study from first to last. But the 'soul' has contacts with the outer world at numerous points. It has contacts with the world of Nature, and the world of other men, and men belong to different ages and countries, and take up various professions. Some are normal human beings, while others are abnormal. Though the soul remains the same basically, yet men in different circumstances behave differently, or reveal different facets of their soul at different moments. A poet illustrates these facets by selecting a wide variety of human types belonging to different professions, ages and countries. This explains the wide variety of subjects which Browning treats of in his poetry. *Crime, art, love, religion, philosophy, Nature, human personality, etc., are the main themes of Browning's poetry.*

The Age Not Reflected in His Poetry

In one respect, Browning stands in sharp contrast to his great contemporary Tennyson. While Tennyson faithfully represents his age in his poetry, the contemporary social and economic trends and problems find only a negligible place, if at all, in the poetry of Browning. There are a few references in his poetry to the rise of spiritualism, as in *Sludge the Medium*, and the ecclesiastical ferment caused by Newman, yet, as a whole, Browning chose to keep himself aloof from the problems of his age. His poetry fails to reflect the conditions of his times. Contemporary trends and problems are not the subjects of Brownings poetry. "Browning did not much love to work on topics connected with his own generation. To him time was a matter

almost of indifference, for the human soul, in which his interest was centred, has remained much the same since the days of Adam. If he had a preference, it was for the Italian Renaissance rather than for any other age or country" **(Hugh Walker)**.

The Renaissance and the Middle Ages

If Browning had any special love for any country it was Itlay, and more specially the Italy of the Renaissance. "Perhaps no English poet ever knew any foreign country so well, as Browning knew Italy, certainly none has dedicated more of his best work to a land which was not his own." And if he loved any age in particular, it was not his own, but the remote and the distant Middle Ages. This is so much so the case that **John Ruskin** writes : "*Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages.*" However, **Hugh Walker** dissents from this estimate and says that Browning's treatment of Medieval themes is superficial and betrays lack of knowledge and understanding. He was not attracted by Medieval Chivalry ; we hear little in his verse of tournaments and feats of Chivalry ; he has also little understanding of medieval faith and mysticism.

Nature

Browning had a great love of nature, and his descriptions of nature have an essentially Italian inspiration. His landscapes are brilliant with flashing colours, "fierce and flashing splendour". He has a special predilection for sunrise and sunset, and the advent of spring, and for sharp edges and irregular outlines. His landscapes are real and actual, and they are always landscapes with human figures. Browning cannot keep his human interests out of his poetry for any length of time. Nature serves as an appropriate background for human thought and emotion, as in *The Grammarian's Funeral*, and *Caliban upon Setebos*.

God, Man and Nature

Browning has his own philosophy, his own theory of the relationship of Man, God and Nature. Both Man and Nature emanate from God, yet, "No common spirit breathes through them both ; they are two entities", though for a moment they may come together as in *The Fireside*. In this respect, he differs from Wordsworth, Shelley and the other romantics. For him. Nature has no vital sympathy for man, no message, and neither is she a refuge for broken spirits. At times, she even wears a mocking appearance as in *Childe Roland*.

Man and His Life : Philosophy

Browning's philosophy of life is characterised by robust optimism. The universe. the beauty of Nature, is an expression of the creative joy of God, and so he finds the principal of Joy at the very Centre of

Creation. This does not mean that he is blind to human imperfections ; rather he builds hope for the future on these very imperfections. His is a philosophy of strenuous endeavour ; true joy lies in effort, and not in success or achievement. Rather failure here means success in the life to come. Faith in God, faith in the immortality of the soul, faith in earnest endeavour are the cardinal points of Browning's philosophy of human life. *Rabbi Ben Ezra* is an epitome of Browning's philosophy.

Religion

Religion, too, finds a prominent place in the poetry of Browning. Religion was a subject dear to Browning's heart and several of his poems deal with the theme of religion. His poems of religion, "cover nearly the whole range of religious thought from the first dim gropings of the natural man for something above himself upto complete faith, and thence downward again to scepticism." *Caliban upon Setebos* is a poem dealing with the religion of a primitive brute. It goes to show that each man has the god whom he deserves. Caliban's deity is created entirely out of his own nature, and the motives attributed to him are those upon which Caliban himself likes to act. On a higher level stand poems such as *Cleon* and *The Epistle of Karshish* in which the mood of heathens as they came in contact with Christianity is vividly represented. Two other religious poems *Saul* and *Rabbi Ben Ezra* are the utterances of Israelites and, in spite of their Jewish garb, there is in these poems the quintessence of true religion. "The latter poem is the embodiment of all that is deepest in Browning's philosophy of religion, and all that is highest in his morality." (**Hugh Walker**). *A Death in the Desert* is also worthy of notice and ranks high in Browning's religious poems. *Holi-Cross Day* represents the force of evil in religious life. *Bishop Blaugram's Apology* is a poem of wavering faith. The apology is put into the mouth of a man who is not quite sure whether to believe or not.

Art

There is no other group of poems which so much holds the soul of the poet as the poems dealing with art. "Like the great leaders of the Italian Renaissance", says **T.S. Young**, "Browning did not confine his interests within the limits of any one art." Poetry, painting and music were the arts which specially attracted Browning, and he found certain qualities common to them all. First, he derived pleasure from every exercise of creative power, whether it were Caliban's grotesque description of an idle summer day, or his own plaster casts in Florence, or the swiftly emerging artistic conceptions in Fra Lippo's mind. In all his artists, there is a marked instinct for the solid, something sensibly shaped by the grip and craft of the hand, like the clay on the potter's wheel ; even the abstract, transitory glories of Abt Vogler's music take the visible, solid form of architecture.

"Secondly, he maintained a consistent attitude towards both technique and connoisseurship. With an unusual knowledge of the technicalities of each of these arts, he had, at the same time, a poor

estimation of mere craftsmanship" (**Young**). The faultless drawing of Andrea del Sarto, the intricate subtleties of the Hugues of the master of Saxe-Gotha, simply betray their impotence when called upon to exercise the crucial function of true art. "Out of me, out of me," cries the faultless painter, remembering the passionate exaltation, careless of precepts and rules, of Rafael and Michael Angelo. "But where's music, the dickens!" exclaims the organist, bewildered by the mathematical muddle of Master Hugues' composition ; whereas in assured calm, Abt Vogler frames out of three sounds, "not a fourth sound, but a star".

Love of art which is not creative carried even less weight with him than technique. The Bishop of St Praxed's and the Duke of Ferrara are soundly equipped with critical taste and knowledge. "But they toil not, neither do they spin ; they contribute nothing ; they are content with the mere pride of possession" (**Young**).

Thirdly, creation, technique, and the tastes of a lover of fine arts were all of them of less significance to him than the soul of the artist. This partly because the artist is already a spirit isolated from the common herd. (Browning had little feeling for the indistinguishable multitude.) "It was partly also because the artist is in many ways the symbolic figure of humanity for him". What he says in *Paracelsus* of men at large is much more obviously the case with the artist :

Truth is within ourselves ; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe :
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness ; and around
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect clear perception—which is truth.

Again, the artist's life symbolises exactly for Browning the history of mankind ; a struggle for expression, a strife to attain an ideal. Paracelsus aspires and attains. It is in each case a struggle waged against many obstacles, against a medium, difficult to handle and with only a dim perception of what is to be the outcome. "It is further more a conflict in which—this is a cardinal point in Browning—man must trust his own inner judgment, as the artist can only portray his own inner conception." To both of them there come at times those visitings from infinity, moments of contact with the eternal, which secure by their flash of illumination a higher step of progress ; for both, this light is dulled by contact with the material world : "Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement." In both the hope is fostered that, "the broken arc will become the perfect round", and thus both, "Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried."

Poets and Poetry

There are not many poets in Browning's varied portrait-gallery of artists. Shelley has his splendid tribute in *Pauline* and in *Memorabilia*, and Keats in *Popularity*. The figure of Aprile in

Paracelsus is too vague and shadowy ; it seems to indicate that the passion of love and the desire of beauty, however benevolent and however intense, are powerless unless allied with the passion for knowledge of which Paracelsus himself is the examplar. *Sordello*, too, is rather an ineffectual soul only lighting upon the secret of adjusting his infinite vision to the narrow limits of time and space at the moment of death. *How it Strikes a Contemporary* gives us an unimaginative contemporary's conclusions about an observant and sensitive poet popularly misunderstood (most of Browning's poets were), and superstitiously shunned. *Transcendentalism* is the criticism of a poet whose tough and difficult thought is clad in a very scanty garb of melody ; it slyly glances at the public attitude towards himself. "In *One Word More* he shifts from the dramatic to the lyrical key to pay a delicate homage to his wife. But there are here no studies, except perhaps *Balaustion*, of the executive talent at work in poetry such as that of Fra Lippo in painting and Abt Vogler in music."

Theory of Poetry : Artistic Principles

In truth, Browning's views on his own art were set out most clearly not in any verse, but in *The Introductory Essay* which he wrote to precede the (supposed) *Letters of Shelley*, published in 1852. In this he developed the distinction between the objective and the subjective poet, attributing to the former the task of reproducing, "things external, whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the manifested action of the human heart and brain", whilst of the latter he says, "Not with the combination of humanity in action but with the primal elements of humanity he has to do ; he digs where he stands, —preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak." Thus the lyric poet is exalted above the dramatic and rightly so if, "truth is within ourselves," in the sense that Browning intended to convey. Shelley's, "noblest and predominating characteristic", is, "his simultaneous perception of Power and Love in the absolute, and of Beauty and Good in the concrete, while he throws, from his poet's station between both, swifter, subtler, and more numerous films for the connexion of each with each than have been thrown by any modern artificer of whom I have knowledge."..."I would rather consider Shelley's poetry as a sublime, fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal..." It is a splendid apology for poetry, and with few exceptions as true of Browning's genius as of Shelley's.

Painters and Painting

Of painting he wrote in *Pictor Ignotus, Old Pictures in Florence, Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto* and some other poems ; but it is in those named above that he entered most into the artist's point of view, showing how the artist works and still more how he feels. "It is noticeable that he did not interpret the greatest masters, but

obscure workers like Pictor Ignotus, or such as have risen only to the second rank, as Andrea, or have salient qualities of temperament, like Fra Lippo and Andrea again," (**T.S. Young**). Browning had a most human tolerance and sympathy for what misses supreme attainment. It is essential to his creed. "Pictor Ignotus and Andrea are studies of failure in painting ; each of them is aware of a loftier ideal, but the causes of failure to realise it differ in the two cases. The unknown painter is timid and technically unaccomplished and sinks acquiescingly into oblivion. Del Sarto is the faultless painter and has had visitings of ambition to vie with Leonardo and Michael Angelo ; but he has a soul too shrivelled and impotent to inspire his icily perfect drawing." *Old Pictures in Florence* gives evidence of the poet's minute acquaintance with the picture galleries, his quick eye for idiosyncrasy in technique and inspiration, his energetic justification of these Italian pioneers of the more vital art of painting when the art of Greece had attained perfection in sculpture ; and lastly, his championship of the effort which fails, in harness, as against the petty mastery which succeeds without strife in a puny or imitative task. Fra Lippo, the painter, in his hearty acceptance of the physical universe, his, "homage to the perishable clay," has more kinship with another aspect of the poet's disposition, namely his pagan love of,

> *"The beauty and the wonder and the power,*
> *The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades.*

The poet did not often take the picture for its own sake, he did not often—an exception is the poem *A Face*—transcribe the picture directly into words, nor for all his knowledge of the craft would he be satisfied with the judgment of a painting from the point of view of pure skill in the use of colour and canvas ; in one way or another his mind would pursue the implication and association of the work. This is only a little less true of his studies of sculpture.

Music and Musicians

Of the early poems on music, *Saul* gives expression to the frank joyousness of youth, in songs of the fields, of bodily swiftness and strength, of martial prowess, of the celebration of valour and the praise of dead heroes. "*A Toccata of Galuppi's* spins out a thin melody which floats faintly over an ocean of ingenuity in composition, reflecting the momentary brilliance and final moral slightness or insignificance of eighteenth century Venice" (**T.S. Young**). When the intricate form of the Hugues has been analysed in *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*, the synthesis of the dissected parts proves to have no breath of vitality, no magical rhythm to set echoing chords in the soul, even in the generous, if a little hot-tempered, judgment of the organist. In these poems, as well as in *Abt Vogler*, the art itself comes to the fore, the artist fades into the background, and with him the interest in a definite personality. "It is a mere accident that the marvellous chord should be struck out by Abt Vogler ; but it is no accident that Andrea's pictures are silver-grey or that Fra Lippo's are something bold and sensuous and realistic ; and this dethronement

of the artist's personality is consonant with Browning's claim for music that it infinitely surpasses the plastic arts and even poetry" (**T. S. Young**). It is, in fact, no longer an art but a revelation, "*the finger of God, a flash of the will that can.*" By poetry and painting we see facets of the truth. gain fragmentary clues to the eternal mind, through recognised formulas, "in obedience of laws." "*Music is the language of God's converse with the soul*" (**Young**).

Crime and Abnormality

Crime, abnormality, "clinical cases," as **Elton** calls them, also attracted Browning and a number of poems deals with crime, murder, felony, cheats, sharpers, and other forms of abnormalities. The *Laboratory* deals with the desire of a woman to poison her rival ; and *Porphyria's Lover* is a study of the abnormal lover who murders his beloved, and then sits calmly with her head on his shoulders. *Chesterton* rightly says that Browning deals not only with sinners, but even with those sinners whom even the sinners have cast away. He shows that even the meanest and the lowest individuals, like Sludge in *Sludge the Medium*, and the Bishop in *Bishop Boulgram's Apology*, have a living faith in God. The poet discovers a soul of good even in things evil.

Love and Lovers

The most characteristic and the most original work of Browning is to be found in his love poetry. Browning is the greatest English poet of love since John Donne ; his love poetry is not to be paralleled in English poetry or the poetry of any other language. The most remarkable thing about them is, their complete independence of convention, their elevation of tone, and their immense variety. "In point of variety," says **Hugh Walker**, "Browning beats all other lyrists of love." Commenting on his treatment of love, **T.S. Young** writes :

"It is another evidence of the poet's curiously dramatic instinct that whilst his own love ran so unhesitating and propitious a course, he, should have explored so often the eddies and backwaters and torrents in the current of love." It is not sufficient for him to pen, "descriptions of the fairest wights," or to find exquisite diction and imagery to figure forth a mood, such as the song for Mariana, "Take, O, take those lips away" ; nor does he like Donne pry into the weird secrets of the past. He treats of actual passion and he stays at whatever moment in its course promises to distil its richest significance. "He seems almost the first to realise that these moments are not necessarily those of the rapture of possession and enjoyment. or the fierce bitterness of rejection, but may be any one of the scores of episodes in the long chronicle." *Hence the novelty of the situations in his love poetry.* "And again he stands apart because romance and passion rarely come singly to him ; his questing, examining intellect led him to segregate all the strands of the mood, to trace it back to its origins and to peer forward to its outcome" If he portrays failure as in *Cristina* or *The Lost Mistress* or *The Last Ride Together*, it is not an occasion for some tempestuous outburst of grief ; but rather for the manliness of temper which gathers strength out of defeat, weaves the experience

into the fabric of character and imbues its resignation. with new thought and resolve for other ventures. "*The tragedies of love are for Browning's women rather than for his men.* The inconstancy he pictures is that dreaded by a wife after her husband's death, as in *Any Wife to Any Husband*, or of one who is constantly endeavouring to seize the hem of the garment of fidelity, but in vain as in *To in the Campagna.*"

Wifehood and Motherhood.

He is not always the poet of love faltering or baffled. He can pipe as melodiously as any Elizabethan a song in praise of beauty. He can find words too for the splendid glow of youthful passion as in the opening of *In a Gondola.* "But the triumphs of love are sung in poems of wifehood and motherhood." The herione of *The Inn Album* says :

Womanliness means only motherhood ;
All love begins and ends there,—roam enough,
But, having run the circle, rest at home.

Pompilia, in *The Ring and the Book*, drawn as **Swinburne** says, "with piercing and over-powering tenderness", is the masterpiece in Browning's gallery of women characters. "*In such poems his own marriage enriched both imagination and emotion*" **(T.S. Young)**

Psycho-analysis, the Main Theme : Unity in Variety

Such are the main themes of Browing's poetry. His themes are wide and varied, and he is interested in all of them because they enable him to study the human soul from various angles, and reveal its many facets. In each poem there is a particular human situation—a love situation, a crime situation, a situation of failure or success in some art—and in each case the situation is important to Browning inasmuch as it reveals the soul of the individual or the individuals concerned. His business was, 'soul dissection', and the human soul is studied in the most varied, the most poignant, and the most unusual situations. "*Browning's is not the drama of the outer world of events. but of the inner world of the soul, where nothing is of importance until it is transformed into a form influencing mind and character.*" Browning's passion was psycho analysis ; he is interested more in painting, "the inner landscape", than, "the outer one." The main theme of Browning's poetry is, 'the inner man', the soul or 'psyche' of the individual, and it is studied in all its complexity and manifold variety. Whatever may be the apparent theme—love, crime, philosophy, religion, art—it is of interest to the poet only because it provides him with an opportunity of unravelling the intricate tangle of human motives, moods, emotions, and thoughts. Writes **Compton Rickett** in this connection ; *All his (Browning's) writings are experimental studies in spiritual experience : whether he deals with love, or patriotism, intellectual ambition or artistic passion, it is all brought to one common denominator—its effect upon character, its value in the making of the soul.*"

3

The Philosophy of Browning

Or

Browning : His Optimism

Or

Browning as a Teacher : His Message

A Philosophic Poet

Critics often speak of, "The message of Browning", or, 'the teaching of Browning'. However, Browning has no formal message, "no Church, no philosophy", in the technical sense. But he had definite and firm views on human life and human nature, and of the relation of both to God. He was, what **Frederick Ryland** calls, "a philosophic poet". In his poetry, he offers us a distinct theory of the relation of man to the universe, and exhibits this theory by means of imaginary characters and scenes.

His Consistency and Originality

He may not have been a very profound thinker, but he is a very consistent one : his philosophy of life was shaped as early as *Pauline*, and it remained unchanged upto the very end. Browning's poetry is characterised by immense variety, but unity is imparted to it by his unchanging views of human destinty. He certainly does not challenge the old theological and metaphysical dogmas ; on the whole, he accepts the conventional view of God, the immortality of the soul, and the Christian belief in Incarnation. Still he is original in the sense that his cheerful optimism is in sharp contrast with the growing pessimism of the age. "He is one of those who rolled back, as far as England is concerned, the morbid pessimism, the sickly disdain of active life, which has infected so much of European literature during the present century" **(Ryland)**.

Not a Cheap Optimist

Browning is a cheerful optimist; optimism is at the very core of his teaching and his view of human life. Contrary to the views

of some critics, his optimism is not 'blind' ; he does not shut his eyes to the suffering and evil that is in life. It is not a cheap optimism ; it is founded on the realities of life. Browning knows, says *Compton-Rickett*, that human life is a bewildering mixture of good and evil, of the lovely and the ugly, of despair and hopefulness, but he derives hope from this very incompleteness and imperfection of life.

Human Imperfections : The Bases of Browning's Optimism

Browning's optimism, says **Chesterton**, "is founded on imperfections of man ; he derives hope from human deficiency". The famous lines in *Pippa Passes*,

> *God is in his heaven,*
> *All is right with the world.*

are often cited as an instance of Browning's blind and cheap optimism. In the face of such human suffering and misery and such wickedness, how can we say that, "All is right with the world". Such views arise from a faulty interpretation of his poetry. When Browning says that, "All is right with the world", he does not mean that there is no suffering or evil in the world ; he means that divine governance is just and benevolent, and what appears to us as evil has its own place in the scheme of things. Thus in the words of **Alexander Pope,** "All discord is harmony not understood", and, "All partial evil, universal good".

Pragmatic Approach : Faith in Experience

However, Browning's attitude towards evil, pain and misery is not merely theoretical and abstract, like that of the 18th century thinkers. He does not accept evil merely as a philosophical counterpart of good, rather he regards evil as a practical instrument of human advancement. His approach to the problem is pragmatic ; it is based on his experience of life. He lays stress on practical experience, and tests every theory on this touchstone. "Whatever enriches the experience, favours aspiration, gives strength to the heart and mind, is good and is to be used by us whether conventionally sanctioned or not. That which enervates, paralyses, deadens is bad and must be put aside" (**Compton-Rickett**). It is only by experience that we can wring knowledge from ignorance.

Faith in Struggle, Not Achievement

Browning is a passionate adherent to the theory of evolution and his optimism is logically justified by this theory. Life is constantly progressing to higher and higher levels. From the lowest creatures, life has advanced to the level represented by man ; and in the imperfection of man lies our hope of further advancement. What is loftiest and noblest in one generation is surpassed by something still loftier and, therefore, still truer in the next. For this advancement—progress in the moral and spiritual sense—persistent struggle with evil

is necessary. Perfection is the ideal, but this ideal can never be wholly attained. Only greater and greater approximation to it is possible. But this failure to achieve the ideal is to be welcomed for the worth of life lies, "in the effort to become perfect; not in accomplishment, but in the strife to accomplish" (**W. T. Young**). Evil is our foe, and no victory is possible without the foe. In other words, Evil is the opportunity offered to us by the Divine to advance spiritually. "*Evil is, therefore, a condition of Man's moral progress*" :

And what is our failure here, but a triumph's evidence,
For the fulness of the days ? Have we withered or agonised ?
Why else was the pause prolonged, but that singing might issue thence ?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized ?

Struggle with Evil and Moral Progress

This is the way in which Browning absorbs evil into a theory of life of which love is the fundamental principle. He does not pronounce, with the facile optimism of Pope and Bolingbroke that, "*whatever is, is right,*" but rather that whatever is, is wrong, for the excellent purpose that we may put it right, and in the effort acquire new moral power :

"*Then, welcome each rebuff*
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go !
Be our joys three parts pain !
Strive, and hold cheap the strain ;
Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge the throe.

Evil is as permanent as good ; and, therefore, man is literally, "ever a fighter", facing, "adventures brave and new," for whom the signal is in Browning's last poetic utterance :

"*Strive and thrive ! cry 'Speed,' —fight on, fare ever,*
There as here."

This Life a Preparation for the Next

In *Rabbi Ben Ezra* we have the most explicit statement of Browning's philosophy of life. It is an epitome of many poems ; it looks on life from the standpoint of age. It is in youth that we gain the experience which helps us later on in our spiritual progress. It is not accomplishment but intention, not the outward result, but the inward aim, that is the real test of worth. The pitcher is now shaped on the wheel, and is thus ready for a future, for a life beyond this life. This life is a preparation for the life to come, and evil and suffering and failure in this life is to be welcomed for it is only through failure that Man can enjoy the pleasures of Heaven. In *Evelyn Hope*, the lover does not despair. He derives consolation from the optimistic faith that God, "*Creates the love to reward the love* ;" true love is sure to be rewarded in the life after death, if not in this life.

Immortality of the Soul

In other words, Browning's firmly-grounded optimism is further strengthened by his faith in the immortality of the soul. The body may die, but the soul lives on in the Infinite. It has an after life or lives ; it has experiences not only in the world and this life, but also in countless lives to come. Life in the other world, life with the Infinite, is far more valuable than life in this finite world. Success in this world means failure in the other world ; and the ideal which is attainable here is worthless, for by attaining it we lose the divine.

Hope Based on Failure and Imperfection

Similarly he, who, believing that, "Man has Forever," leaves, "Now, for dogs and apes," is sure to be incomprehensible to the world, to fail by its standards ; and this is the kind of failure that Browning so constantly exalts :

This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit :
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.

Failure of this kind is, as **Professor Henry Jones** has it, "the last word but one". It is expressed in different words in *Andrea Del Sarto* :

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's heaven for ?

We come here upon the confirmation of the doctrine that imperfection and failure are man's glory ; the ideals which the soul illlumines are beacons in the far distance ; their unattainablility is both the prophecy and the instigation of progress.

Intention and Effort : Their Value

It follows likewise that judgment is passed, not on the thing accomplished,

Not on the vulgar mass
Called 'work' must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price ;

but upon the impulse, the intention, the nobility of soul which prompts the attempt, and which may only emerge into clear consciousness, "when eternity affirms the conception of an hour".

All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the picther shaped.

What is attempted in such a spirit cannot be completed in the limited sphere of the temporal ; on the earth there are the, "broken arcs ; in the heaven, a perfect round."

Death, The Gateway to Heaven

In the light of this conception death becomes not the herald of extinction, but

A groom
That brings a taper to the outward room

where the soul may pursue its designs unfettered and unhindered ; this is the faith which inspires *The Epilogue* to *Asolando* and *Prospice* :

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end ;
And the element's rage, the fiend voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest.

God : Faith in His Love and Mercy

These lines also bring out Browning's firm faith in God. "*He never questions the existence of a Supreme authority, or God, controlling the manifold energies of the world.*" Even his knaves and rogues have firm faith in God, and rely upon His perfection and His mercy. They constantly talk of their relation with him, and are sure of ultimate union with the Absolute. Sympathetic communion, according to Browning, between Man and God is possible because in addition to His attributes of power and Knowledge, he has the highest attribute of all, the attribute of love. It is love which kindles and exalts both knowledge and power, and as love is common both to God and Man, it is through love that Man touches the Infinite. It is love which harmonises and unites all living beings ; and it is on love that all Browning's characters build their faith ; "*God, Thou art Love I build my faith on that,*" and further, "*So the All Great were the All loving too*". The world is beautiful, for God created it out of the fullness of His love :

O, world as God has made it, all is beauty :
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.

Life in this world is worth living, for both life and the world are the expressions of Divine Love.

Zest for Life : Joy in Nature

Browning's optimism is further seen in the fact that he finds the passion of joy running in all Nature. Joy is at the very core of nature, and Browning is never tired of emphasising this fact. This joy in nature is derived from the Creative Joy of God, the delight He takes in the work of Creation. Nature is being made incessantly, and from this results the joyful rush of life in all things. Browning's ecstasy in mere living, his rapturous joy in his own life, and in the life of Nature, results from his faith in the Creative Joy of the

Supreme. Says **Hugh Walker** that no one has sung more fervently than he of the delight of life. David in *Saul*, Pippa in *Pippa Passes*, Fra Lippo Lippi, and a host of other characters are keenly alive to the pleasure of living. *Rabbi Ben Ezra* condemns the ascetic negation of the flesh, and asserts the necessity and moral usefulness both of the flesh and the soul :

As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry, "All good things,
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, then flesh helps soul.

Browning's Message

To conclude : Browning's message in one of invincible faith and optimism. He spoke the strongest word of faith in an age of doubt and passimism. "His energy, his cheerful courage, his faith in life, and in the development that awaits us beyond the portals of death, are like a bugle-call to good living" (**Long**). *Of all English poets, no other is so completely, so consciously, so magnificently a teacher of man.* He retained his faith and courage in a world of doubt and timidity For thirty years, he faced cheerfully the indifference of his age, and ultimately made the world recognise and follow him. His thought has been surely and steadily taking possession of the hearts of educated men and women, and this accouns for his increased popularity both at home and abroad.

4

Browning as a Literary Artist

Or

Browning's Language, Style and Versification

Browning : a Conscious Artist

Critics after critics of Browning's poetry have regarded Browning as a philosopher-poet, and not as a great literary artist. Browning was a highly original geniu', his poems are vigorous and unique, they perplexed and baffled his contemporaries who, therefore, considered him as a philosopher and logician but not a poet. It has been supposed that his processes of thought are scientific in their precision and analysis. But as **Chesterton** puts it, "this is a gross and complete slander upon Browning". He might be rough, grotesque and rugged occasionally, he might be a bit careless now and then, but there can be no denying the fact that he was a conscious and deliberate artist who knew perfectly well what he was doing, and who did it effectively and in the best possible way.

Formal Beauty : Its Three Aspects

It is generally supposed that Browning did not care for the form of his poetry. Now the beauty of form in poetry depends on three things (a) a harmonious composition, varied but at unity, (c) a noble style, and (c) a clear, sweet melody of verse. *In all these three respects, Browning cared for form, "more than any other English poet that ever lived"* (**Chesterton**).

A Great Originator of Poetic Forms

He was always weaving and modelling and inventing new forms. "Among all his two hundred to three hundred poems, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that there are half as many different verse-forms as there are different poems." As soon as a new idea entered his head, he tried to invent a new form to express it, and in this way he created a large number of quite novel and quite admirable artistic forms. His business was, "soul-dissection, and for this purpose he developed and perfected the dramatic monologue, and used it most effectively." The *Ring and the Book* is an interesting departure on literary method—the same story is told from different points of

view by different characters, and in telling the story each of them expresses his or her own nature. Again, *Pippa Passes* has an original form. It is a series of detached dramas connected only by the presence of one isolated figure. The poet who invents such forms is a, 'maker', in the true sense ; he makes other poets. Browning was not indifferent to technical beauty, or beauty of form ; he invented new forms, lovely in their own way, and it is an entirely different matter that others did not like the kind of beauty he created.

Formal Beauty : Unity and Compactness

Referring to the form of Browning's poetry, **Arthur Symons** in his admirable book *Introduction to Browning's Poetry* points out that his poems are almost invariably works of art. He always has a noble end in view, and attains it completely. "There is no characteristic of his work more admirable or more rare than the unity, the compactness and completeness, the skill and care in construction and definiteness in the impression of each poem." For example, almost all the poems in the volume *Men and Women* are designed, constructed and finished with the skill of an architect. There is no doubt, as **S. A. Brooke** points out, that often his composition is broken up and over-crowded. Too many side-issue are introduced, everything that he imagines is cast upon the canvas, there is too little of artistic selecting and ordering of material. But all this seeming lack of selection and restraint is not the result of carelessness, rather such details and digressions are perfectly appropriate in their place and contribute to the perfection of the whole. More often than not, they are integral to the purpose of Browning. They result from the richness of his thought, and not from faulty craftmanship. **T.S. Young** is right when he says that Browning was never formless. "There is a marvellous sense of proportion in the importance assigned to various features in his dramatic monologues ; every element plays a significant but not over-emphasised part : hence the unity of atmosphere and effect". Despite its excessive luxuriance, no work in English shows such sustained constructive capacity as *The Ring and the Book*.

Style and Diction : Its Chief Features

Beauty of form in poetry also depends on the style and diction of a poet. Browning was a highly original genius, his style is entirely individual, and so for want of a better name it is called Browningesque. The chief features of Browning's style are listed by **Mrs. Orr** and other critics as follows :

1. He uses the smallest number of words that his meaning allows. In the very beginning of his career, he was once charged with verbosity, and since then, "he contended himself with the use of two words where he would rather have used ten." This dread of being diffuse resulted in compression and condensation which made him often, if not actually obscure, at least difficult to understand. *Clearness and lucidity were thus sacrificed ; the easy was thus made difficult.*

2. Browning is particularly sparing in the use of adjectives.

3. He uses mono-syllablic words wherever this is possible.

4. He further condenses his style by abbreviations and omissions. For example, *'in'*, *'on'*, and *'of'* become *'i'*, *'o'*, etc., in his poetry. Pronouns, articles, conjunctions, and prepositions are frequently left out. Such a telegraphic style further increases the difficulty of the readers. Browning is obscure, if at all, not by his thought, but by the way in which he expresses it.

5. As **S. A. Brooke** points out, while other poets put the right word in the right place, Browning continually puts his words in the wrong places. Inverted constructions are frequent with him. For example, a line like, "*Irks care the cropful bird ?, Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast*", is a very ugly and a very bad line for this reason. It is often, "tail first", with him.

6. Often he leaves his sentences half-finished and his meaning half expressed. He leaves out words necessary for an easy understanding of a passage, and for no other reason except his whim or caprice.

7. His style is too heavily over-loaded with parentheses, which are stumbling blocks in the way of his readers.

8. It is also overloaded with Latin expressions and allusions and refrences to little known sources.

Browning's Use of the Grotesque

9. Often Browning is rugged, grotesque and fantastic. Browning's use of the ugly and the knotty is often justified. According to **Chesterton**, Browning's "*artistic originality lies in the serious use of the grotesque*". There is much that is ugly, fantastic, and grotesque in nature. Browning had a specially keen eye for the grotesque and the odd in nature, and the grotesque in his style is the natural vehicle for the conveyance of the odd and the fantastic in nature. Such artistic use of the grotesque is the source of the strength and energy of his style. This is so in the following lines from *The Englishman in Italy* :

> *And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner of horns and of humps,*
> *Which only the fisher looks grave at.*

And just as Browning dwells on the oddity of a fungus or a Jelly-fish, he also dwells on the oddity of a philosophical idea. He uses grotesque images and expressions to convey the strangeness and oddity of an idea. In *Sludge* he uses the grotesque image of a shapeless sea-beast to convey the noble idea that small things are as much filled with God as the great. Such symbolic use of the grotesque is admirable. He also uses the grotesque and the fantastic to startle and surprise, and thus capture attention. It tickles our sense of wonder, and contributes much to Browning's humour.

There is no doubt that the fantastic, the eccentric, and the grotesque in language and imagery is the natural clothing to Browning's thought. For him, the grotesque was necessary to express the subtleties of thought and emotion and oddities of character. He would not have been himself, he would have lost much of his strength, energy and originality, had he written differently. But it must also be admitted that his use of the grotesque is not always justified. It is often overdone. He is often perverse and childish in his eccentricities. His indulgence in ingenuous puns, and rhymes and grammatical structures is often capricious and wilful, and this makes his poetry like a Chinese puzzle for his readers. Such exaggerated use of quips and cranks cannot be justified on any philosophical and artistic grounds. It seems that there was something knotty in Browning's brain and his grotesque fancy often carries him off his feet. The use of words like, "*beauteousest*", '*grieffuI*', '*irreligiousest*', etc., is entirely unjustified.

Dramatic and Varied Style

Certainly, Browning has his faults. He is often dark and elliptical, and lacks clarity and lucidity, often his love of the grotesque betrays him into unjustified excesses. But there is another side, too, to the picture. His uncouth effusions must not be treated as his masterpieces. Like all other artists, he too, has his weak and ugly moments. *When at his best, Browning is a great and original artist in the use of words.* In this respect, he may be ranked with such innovators as Donne and Wordsworth. His use of language is dramatic. His purpose was character-delineation and his language is skilfully varied to suit the character who speaks it. He, therefore, uses words of all kinds, learned, poetic, archaic, unfamiliar, technical, colloquial, slang, rugged, grotesque, etc. Sometimes, words from most varied levels are used within the compass of a single poem as in *Fra Lippo Lippi*. His use of language is functional and not decorative. Hence it is that he avoids the use of adjectives. As **R. J. King** in his sympathetic study of Browning points out, the poet's use of language is determined by the mood and temper of the speaker. His syntax is often emotive rather than logical or grammatical ; it exactly expresses the emotional state of the character who happens to be speaking. For example, in *Andrea Del Sarto*, Andrea's weariness and boredom is conveyed by the use of a language lacking in, 'action words'. Very few verbs have been used. The use of compound words, of questions and exclamations, the repetition of certain words, and the use of alliteration, all impart a conversational character to his monologues, and help in character-portrayal. *In this respect, Browning is a great pioneer and has set the fashion for the 20th century.*

Pictorial-Elements

As an artist with words, Browning's one great care was to convey his meaning, the mood and emotions of his characters, their environment, etc., as accurately and precisely as possible. Irony, paradox,

and fun are all used by him to further his meaning as in *Andrea Del Sarto*. In this very poem the use of such associated words as 'silver', 'grey', 'greyness', 'twilight', and 'autumn' strikingly convey the sense of weariness, and emotional and spiritual sterility of Andrea. Word-pictures, too, abound in Browning's poetry. He is a great and original painter of landscapes, not with the brush, but with words. *In a Gondola* is rich in this pictorial quality. "Here it seems as if a picture is painted after the manner of the Venetian school ; we seem to be looking at something created by the brush of a great painter." His descriptions of sunset and sunrise, and of the advent of spring, are always magnificent picture-writing.

Browning's Imagery : Original and Symbolic

Browning's style is a pictorial style ; it is also rich in the use of imagery, similies, metaphors, etc. His images are usually startling in their originality and daring. Often they are drawn from the grotesque in nature. Nature is constantly used to illustrate the facts of human life. Often the concrete is used to clarify and bring home to the readers the spiritual and the abstract. His images are clear cut and vivid, and more often than not they have a symbolic significance. For example, in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* the potter symbolises God, his wheel stands for the world, and the pitcher for the human soul. In *Abt Vogler*, beautiful imagery has been used to vivify the hall of music built carefully by the musician. In *Andrea Del Sarto*, the phrase, "serpentining beauty", vividly brings out the destructive effect of Lucrezia on the soul of her husband. The moon and the stars are ever-recurring symbols in Browning's poetry. *His use of imagery is more functional than decorative.*

Ruggedness in Diction and Versification

Just as in his style, so also in his versification, Browning is often rugged and fantastic. Sometimes, this ruggedness is justified by the subject ; sometimes the use of a broken, varying, irregular verse is essential to convey the particular emotion or the impression which the poet wants to convey. Browning had a peculiarly keen ear for a particular kind of staccato music, for a kind of galloping rhythm as in the scolding of the organist in *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*. Often his, "*verse sprawls like the trees, dances like the dust ; it is rugged like a thunder-cloud ; it is top-heavy like the toad-stool*". Often he uses double or even triple rhymes to create grotesque effects. The real fault does not lie with such artistic use of the rugged and the fantastic ; the real fault arises when such a use is not necessary, when it is not artistically justified. And Browning's search for novelty frequently betrays him into using such clumsy and irritating metres, and this clouds his intrinsic merits as a metrical artist.

A Great Experimenter with Verse-form

As a matter of fact, Browning was a great metrical artist and throughout his career he experimented with a variety of stanza-forms, rhyme-schemes, and other metrical devices. **Arthur Symons** regards him as, "the greatest master in our language", in the use of rhyme,

in the amazing variety of his versification and stanza-forms, and in the vitality both of his blank verse and rhymed verse. **Symons** further writes, "Browning is far indeed from paying no attention, or little, to metre and versification. Except in some of his late blank verse, and in a few other cases, his very errors are just as often the result of hazardous experiments as of carelessness and inattention. In one very important matter, that of rhyme, he is perhaps the greatest master in our language ; in single and double, in simple and grotesque alike, he succeeds in fitting rhyme to rhyme with a perfection which I have never found in any other poet of any age." His lyrical poems contain more structural varieties of form than those of any other preceding English poet, not excepting Shelley. His blank verse, at its best, is of a higher quality than that of any other modern poet. And both in rhymed and blank verse, he has written passages which for almost every quality of verse are hardly to be surpassed in the English language.

His Blank Verse : Its Flexibility

D. C. Somerwell, praising Browning's blank verse writes, "Browning will come to be recognized as one of the greatest masters of the greatest of English poetic measures, blank verse. His blank verse has a wider range than that of any other English poet, for he can use it not only for high poetry but also very effectively, for the purposes for which Shakespeare used prose. At one end of the scale, he is a master of the slow-moving, artfully composed, highly ornamental style, in which both Milton and Tennyson surpassed him. Browning's best and most characteristic work does not lie here ; nonetheless, I think that *Rudel to Lady of Tripoli* is a good poem of its kind. At the other end of the scale, he uses blank verse with unequalled skill and power for humorous conversation." As a matter of fact, few writers have ever had a greater flexibility of style than Browning. In *Grammarian's Funeral*, as the disciples of the dead Grammarian climb the mountain, "*the lines of the poem seem actually to move to the steady climbing rhythm of their feet*" :

Here is the top peak ; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there :
This man decided not to live but know—
Bury this man there.

In *The Last Ride Together*, the wonderfully long-drawn rhythm echoes closely the steady stride of the horses, as they bear their riders farther and farther :

What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old, yet new,
....
....
Ride, ride together, for ever ride ?

Variety of Verse-patterns and Rhythms

In his lyric poems, Browning has used an amazing variety of verse-patterns and rhythms. In *Pippa Passes* the lyric verse is varied,

like her songs, and Browning, says, **Gosse**, has succeeded in capturing the exquisite melody of her songs In *Saul*, he has succeeded in capturing the choral symphony of nature, and in *One Way of Love*, he has used the simplest of lyric measures with great skill. He was a brilliant rhymer and could adjust both rhythm and rhyme to the meaning he sought to convey. In his use of metre, he could invariably rise equal to the occasion.

Browning's Versification : Some Distinctive Features

Mrs. Orr, praising Browning's skill and originality as a metrist, notes the following distinctive features of his versification :

1. Browning treats consonants as the backbone of his language, and hence, as the essential feature of his rhymes.

2. He uses double and triple rhymes to 'create humorous or satirical effects as in the *Flight of the Duchess*, *Christmas Eve* and *Pacchiarotto*.

3. He always uses the measure most appropriate to his subject, whether it be blank verse, or heroic rhymed verse. His smaller poems contain almost every kind of lyric measure.

4. He takes no liberties with unusual measures, though he takes liberties freely with the usual to impart variety to them and increase their effectiveness.

His Ear for Music : Poetic Theories

It is a complete slander on Browning to say that he had no ear for music. Browning inherited from his mother her great love of music. He had a trained ear for melody and music, but in keeping with his theories of poetic art, he often sacrificed sound to sense. Not that he did not care for sound, he cared more for sense. With all his love of music, he was more susceptible to sense than to sound. He often neglected music or melody, or even deliberately injured it, in his desire for significance. Often, as **S.A. Brooke** says, he injured the melody of his verse by casting into the middle of it, like stones into a clear water, rough parenthetic sounds to suit his parenthetic phrases. Sometimes, he broke his melody into two by introducing violent clanging words, and discordant sounds. By his interest in, *"quaint oddities of sound, in jarring tricks of metre, in fantastic and difficult arrangements of rhyme, in scientific displays of double rhymes, he, only too often, immolates melody on the alter of his own cleverness."*

Conclusion : His Real Greatness as a Metrist

Browning's determination to sacrifice the sound to sense is the secret of whatever repels us in his verse, as also of whatever attracts. Wherever in Browning's poetry, says **Mrs. Orr**, *"sense keeps company with sound, we have a music far deeper than can arise from mere sound."* This accounts for the nobility and dignity of such poems as *Abt Vogler*, and certain passages in *Paracelsus*. At such moments, style, melody and composition are always in the closest relation, and such noble compositions are lasting monuments of literary art. They are the measure of Browning's real greatness.

5

Browning's Obscurity : Its Causes

Browning's Obscurity : Opinion of Critics

Much ink has been spilt in proving and disproving, too, that Browning is an obscure poet. Spirited defence of Browning has been made by sympathetic critics like **Arthur Symons G K Chesterton, Swinburne**, **Mrs. Orr** and others. But despite all this defence, it is hard to absolve Browning of the charge of unintelligibility and difficulty. In his own age, Browning was considered very difficult and obscure and hence could not achieve popularity and recognition like his contemporary Tennyson. When *Sordello* was published, it was regarded as a hopelessly obscure poem, more obscure than any other poem in the English language. *Mrs. Carlyle* read the poem and could not judge whether Sordello was a man, or a city, or a book. The story goes that *Douglas Jerrold*, just recovering from a long illness, read the poem, and, as he could not understand even two lines of it, exclaimed in great panic, "My God ! I am an idiot. My health is restored, but my mind is gone." Such stories, whether true or not, are, undoubtedly, telling comments on the difficult nature of the poem and the difficulty of Browning's poetry increased with the passing of time.

Obscurity : Not the Result of Pride or Profundity

Browning certainly is a very difficult poet. **Dawson** calls him, "*the Carlyle of poetry*". Various reasons are given for the obscurity and difficulty of his poetry. According to some critics, obscurity of Browning's poetry, "is a piece of intellectual vanity indulged in more and more insolently as his years and fame increased." But as **Chesterton** points out, all the records of Browning's long life and career show that he was not at all vain. All his contemporaries agree that he never talked cleverly or tried to talk cleverly which is always the case with a man who is intellectually vain. It is psychologically improbable that the poet, "made his poems complicated from mere pride in his powers and contempt of his readers" (**Chesterton**). According to the learned critic, the poet, "was not unintelligible because he was proud, but unintelligible because he was humble." Browning did not elaborate, explain, and clarify, because he was humble, and so did not think that he had anything new or significant to say. He was humble enough to think

that what he knew was quite commonplace, and was known even to the man in the street. Outward obscurity in the case of Browning, as in the case of others also, is a mark of inward clarity. His own concepts were quite clear to him. he found nothing difficult or profound in them. and so thought that it was equally obvious to others. Neither was Browning obscure because he was profound. He was frequently profound, and he was occasionally obscure, but the two things have little to do with each other. He is dark and elliptical even in poems in which there is nothing abstruse or philosophical, as in the following :

Hobbs hints blue—straight he turtle eats.
Nobbes prints blue—claret crowns his cup.
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats—
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up ?
What porridge had John Keats ?

It is fantastic, it is grotesque, and it is enigmatical, but there is nothing philosophical about it. Browning is not obscure because he is a philosophical poet ; the real reasons of his obscurity lie elsewhere. In the passage in question, the obscurity arises from Brownings' use of the unfamiliar and unusual, 'Murex', the key-word in the passage and essential for its understanding. More often than not, the key-word in a passage is missing, and so it becomes dark and obscure.

Some Reasons for Browning's Obscurity

Obscurity in Browning's poetry results not from any one reason, but from a number of reasons, which may be summarised as follows :

(1) High Conception of Poetry

Browning had a very high conception of his own calling. He did not care to cater to the tastes of the reading public who were used to the easy and smooth verse of Tennyson. He once wrote to a friend, "I never designedly tried to puzzle people, as some of my critics have supposed ..on the other hand, I never pretend to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar, or a game of dominoes." He believed that a poet should try to put, "the infinite within the finite", and so should suggest much more than he describes. According to his view, poetry has never been generally understood, but the poet should not care for it ; his business is with God. to whom he is accountable. Thus Browning's theory of poetry accounts, to some extent, for the difficult nature of his poetry. It requires some painstaking on the part of the readers as well. It is not a kind of poetry to be read merely to while way a leisure hour.

(2) His Novelty

Browning was a highly original genius, and his poetry was entirely different from the kind of poetry to which his contemporaries were used, and its very novelty hampered understanding.

They were used to short lyrics, and so found Browning's long, argumentative and philosophical poems tiresome and boring.

(3) 'Soul-Dissection' and Interior Landscape

Obscurity is inherent in the Dramatic Monologue, the form of poetry which he made particularly his own. Browning's dramatic monologues are soul studies ; they study the shifting moods and changing thoughts of a developing soul. It is always soul-dissection, it is thought, thought and thought all the way. It is always, "interior landscape", with no chronology or background or elucidiatory matter. Obviously, such a poetry is bound to be difficult.

(4) Interest in the Odd and the Abnormal

This difficulty of comprehension is further increased by the fact that he was interested in the queerest human souls, and tried to probe the odd and the abnormal in human psychology. "He sought the sinners whom even the sinners had cast out", and tried to show that even they might be generous and humane. He tried to reveal the essential nobility and humanity even of such a mean imposter as Sludge.

(5) Browning's Learning

Browning was a very learned poet, and his learning is a stumbling block in the way of his readers. His schooling was mostly private, and so his learning was more profound and thorough than of those who have been educated at school. He had gone through all the stupendous *Dictionary* of Dr. Johnson and his knowledge of history was encyclopedeaic in its vastness. He knew in detail the history and geography not of one country, but of a number of countries. Many of his poems require a knowledge of medieval history, and out-of-the-way periods of Italian history. As his readers lack such a vast and exhaustive knowledge, they find him obscure. Names from the geography and history of other countries are often stumbling blocks in their way. This is particularly the case with poems like *Paracelsus, Sordello,* and *Ring and the Book.*

(6) Obscure References and Allusions

Many of Browning's poems are heavily over-loaded with his stupendous learning. There is frequent use of Latin expressions and quotations, there are allusions to little known literary, mythological and historical sources. *Andrea del Sarto* and the *Grammarian's Funeral* require detailed information of Medieval and Renaissance art and culture of Europe. Poems like *Old Pictures in Florence, Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,* even *One Word More* are beyond the comprehension of an average reader for this reason. The very title of certain poems as for example, *Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis* are learned and forbidding.

Browning sought his subject in many lands and his allusions are drawn from many little known sources.

(7) **Use of Far-fetched Imagery**

Often Browning's metaphors, similies and illustrations are far-fetched and recondite, as in *Two in the Campagna*, and in *Memorabilia.*

(8) **Telegraphic Style**

Often Browning writes a telegraphic style. Relatives, prepositions, articles, even pronouns are left out. At other times, words are contracted, participles are clipped, and vowels are suppressed. It might be that his pen failed to keep pace with the rush of his ideas, but such telegraphic style is certainly confusing and bewildering for his readers.

(9) **Disregard of Grammar and Syntax**

Browning's frequent inversions and the use of long, involved sentences, heavily overloaded with parentheses, create almost unsurmountable difficulties in the way of his readers. In poems like *The Grammarian's Funeral*, he not only buries the grammarian but also grammar.

(10) **His Grotesqueries**

Frequently, he coins new words, uses unusual compounds and expressions, and is too colloquial, jerky, abrupt, and rugged. These faults make a poem like *Of Pacchiarotto* almost unintelligible. His grotesqueries and eccentricities may startle and capture attention, but more often than not they obscure his meaning, as in *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

(11) **Excessive Condensation**

When his *Sordello* first appeared, he was accused of verbosity, and since then he made it his rule to use only two words where ten were needed. Obviously, such compression and concentration clouds the sense. As a result of such density, the readers are likely to suffer from, "*mental or even imaginative indigestion*". He admits this complexity of his poetry in *Rabbi Ben Ezra* :

> *Thoughts hardly to be packed*
> *Into a narrow act,*
> *Fancies that broke through language and escaped.*

and in *Pauline* we are told,

> *For fancies followed thought and bore me off,*
> *And left all indistinct ; ere one was caught*
> *Another glanced.*

Conclusion : Exaggeration of Browning's Obscurity

However, the obscurity of Browning's poetry must not be exaggerated. As *Duffin* points out, the majority of Browning's shorter poems are read as easily as the verse of Tennyson. Poems like *Evelym Hope*, *The Last Ride Together*, *The Patriot*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *Prosp:ce*, *My Last Duchess*, *Home-Thoughts from Abroad*, etc., are perfectly lucid and simple. The intelligent reader can enjoy most of his lyrics and his longer poems in blank verse after a little mental adjustment. Even in his thorniest poems there are passages of great originality and eloquence, of classical beauty, and easy comprehension.

6

Browning as a Poet of Man

Or

Browning's Art of Characterisation

Or

Psycho-analysis in Browning's Poetry

Browning's Characterisation : Its Range and Variety

Browning is primarily the poet of man. The range and variety of his characterisation is wide and varied. *"No other English poet since Shakespeare has shown such a varied and subtle insight into human character."* Wordsworth and Tennyson, too, were great painters of character, but there characters are all English, while Browning goes to Italy, France, Germany, and Spain in search of his *dramatis personae.* Referring to the immense variety of Browning's characters. **A. Symons** in his admirable book *Introduction to Browning* writes, "The men and women who live and move in the new world of his creation are as varied as life itself. There are kings and beggars, saints and lovers, great painters, musicians, priests and popes, jews, gipsies, street-girls, princesses, dancers with the wicked witchery of the daughter of Herodias, wives with the devotion of the wife of Brutus, joyous girls and malevolent gray bearded statesmen, cavaliers, soldiers, tyrants and bigots, ancient sages and modern spiritualists, heretics, scholars, scoundrels, devotees, rabbis, persons of quality and men of low character, statesmen and women, as multiform as nature and society has made them." Browning found and studied humanity not only in English towns and villages in the glare of gaslight and under the open sky, but on the Roman campagna, in Venetian gondolas, in Florentine streets, on the Boulevards of Paris and the Pardo of Madrid, in the snow-bound forests of Russia, beneath the palms of Persia and upon Egyptian sands, on the coast of Normandy and the salt plains of Brittany."

The Artists : Their Representative Value

All types of men and women are represented in his poetry. Specially keen is his insight into the soul of artists, poets, scholars,

painters, sculptures, musicians, etc. He has given us a number of penetrating studies of painters, their characters, and their aspirations. Thus Andrea is a painter, *Abt Vogler* deals with the soul of a musician and *How It Strikes a Contemporary* also has a poet for its subject. His characters are drawn from different ages and epoch's of history, and through them he has distilled the very essence of their respective ages.

City-characters : Their Individuality

Another peculiarity of Browning's characterisation is that his characters are all drawn from the city. Unlike Wordsworth, Browning has no touch of the recluse about him; he is the child of cities and not of rural solitudes. Born and bread a Londoner, his concern is with the great metropolitan towns of Europe, London, Venice, Florence, and many others. The faces in the city streets are sacred to him; they wear for him the very mask of the deity. Further, as a poet of man, Browning is not interested in the mass of men and women, but in the life and character of individuals. He had a deep sense of the sanctity of human difference. It is this difference, this individuality, this idiosyncrasy, that he is never tired of emphasising. He was hugely interested in all human beings, but it would be quite untrue to say of him that he loved humanity. He did not love humanity but Man. He is the poet of Man and not of men. "His sense of difference between one man and another", says **G.K. Chesterton**, "would have made the thought of melting them into a lump called humanity loathsome and prosaic." **Symons** says, "As a thinker, he conceives of humanity not as an aggregate, but as a collection of units".

Characters in Solitude : Their Isolation

Browning is largely a poet of lonely and solitary human natures who have no relatives to bother about. As **Frederick Ryland** points out, no doubt he does present groups of characters, and also describes how they feel and think, but it is rarely that he can convince us that they also act and re-act upon each other. He rarely succeeds in showing them in action. He is essentially a poet of single characters in solitude. The remarks of **Arthur Symons** in this connection are interesting : "The quiet routine existence of uneventful lives hardly touched him more than the placid quiescence of animal and vegetable existence ; the commonplace of humanity excited in him no mystic rapture......*And as Browning deals little with the commonplace in human nature, so he passes by with a light concern the natural relationships into which men are born, as compared with those which they enter by passion or choice.*" The bond of kinship, the love between parents and children, brothers and sisters, so prolific of poetry elsewhere, is singularly rare and unimportant in Brownings. For him only love between men and women, sexual love is a kindling theme. The names of husband, of wife, of lover, vibrate for him with a poetry more thrilling than that of any other poet of his generation. *His choicest and loveliest figures are lonely and unattached.* Pippa, David, Pompilia, Sordello, Paracelsus, Balaustion, Mildred, Caponasacchi, have no ties

of home or blood, or only such as work malignly upon their fate. Mildred has a mother, and she falls; Soredello moves like a Shelleyan shadow about his father's house; Balaustion breaks away from the ties of kindred to become a spiritual daughter of Athens; Paracelsus goes forth, glorious in the possession of the secret of 'the world', which is his alone; Caponasacchi himself sisterless and motherless, releases Pompilia from the doom inflicted on her by her parent's calculating greed; the song of Pippa releases Luigi from the nobler, yet hurtful bondage of his mother's love.

The "Clinical Cases": The Abnormal and the Wicked

Browning evinces a keen interest even in the worst of human natures; he is as much interested in the noble and the generous as in the wicked and the crooked. He has a living dramatic interest in villainy, crime, and abnormality of every kind, in '*Clinical Cases*' as **O. Elton** calls them. The more subtle and complex the crime, the greater is Browning's interest in it. In *Ivon Ivanovich*, the mother saves her life by throwing her children to the wolves, in *The Laboratory* we are shown a woman buying poison for her rival, and in *Porphyria's Lover*, we have the lover who murders his beloved. Murderers, cheats, sharpers, prostitutes, villians and depraved natures, of all shades, find their place in the pages of Browning.

Faith in Human Nature: Variety of Moral Types

Browning does not ignore the seamy side of life as does Wordsworth. Not that his characters are divisible into good and bad, even his rogues have much good in them. As **Chesterton** points out, "the poet does not hold a brief merely for sinners; he shows that there is some good even in those sinners whom even the sinners have abandoned". Such is his faith in the goodness of human nature that he shows that even an imposter like Djabal can be generous and high-minded, that even a mean imposter like Sludge has a human soul. Such rougues come curiously alive in his hands and impress us by their vividness and reality. The poet is at his best in the depiction of complex human natures, rather than the simple ones. *His poetry is full of the swarning variety of moral types; through them he illustrates his philosophy of life, his faith in God, his faith in the essential goodness of human nature.*

Browning's Women: Their Variety and Vividness

Nor has Browning over looked womanhood. His poetry is a well-stored picture-gallery of faithful and vital representations of feminine nature. Praising Browning's treatment of women, **Arthur Symons** writes, "I do not hesitate to put his portraits of women quite on a level with his portraits of men, and far beyond those of any other English poet of the last three centuries. In some of them, notably in Pompilia, there is something—I can hardly describe it—which always seems to me almost incredible in a man: an instinct that one would have thought only a woman could possess. And his women,

good or bad, are always real women, and they are represented without bias." Browning is one of the very few poets who can paint women without idealisation or degradation, not from the men's side, but from their own : as living equals, not as goddesses or as toys. The loveliest of them have a very rare girlish charm about them. His women live, act, and suffer, even think, not assertively or mannishly, but with natural volition, on equal rights with men. Any one who has thought at all on the matter will acknowledge that this is the highest praise that could be given—the highest and rarest. "Browning's women are not, indeed, as various as his men ; but from Ottima to Pompilia—from the, 'great white queen, magnificent in sin', to the, 'Lily of a maiden, white with intact leaf'—what a range and gradation of character ! These are the two extremes ; between them, as earth lies between heaven and hell, are stationed all the others, from the faint and delicate dawn in Pauline to Michal and Palma, on through Pippa and Mildred and Colombe and Constance, to Balaustion and Elvire, Fifine and Clara and the heroine of the *Inn Album*."

Rendering of the "Inner Man" : Psycho-analysis

Browning could vevify a character through a few, deft touches. Not only the main or central figures, but also the secondary characters are living, breathing realities Even they are curiously alive. But his real interest was not in the externals of characters. His real interest was, "in the incidents in the development of a soul" and he considered nothing else as a suitable subject of study. That is why, he does not define the physical charms of even his female characters. We know of their beauty only by the passion which they excite. He was interested in the study of the soul, in pychological-analysis, in probing deep into the mental processes of his characters, in analysing their motives, in short, in laying bare their souls before his readers. He was interested in rendering the, 'inner man', in painting the, 'inner landscape'. His purpose was primarily, "soul dissection", and for this purpose he used and perfected the dramatic monologue, a poetic form best suited for depicting the soul or *Psyche* of his characters. In one monologue after another, the central figure reveals himself through his monologue, or his conversation with his ownself His method of painting character is dramatic ; he does not sketch a character directly, but allows the character to soliloquise, and thus himself reveal his own real self. In each monologue. in addition to the principal figures, there are one or more secondary figures who serve as interlocutors, and thus help in bringing out the speaker. The speaker, as he speaks. not only reveals his own inner self, but also the character of the interlocutar or the listener, or even of some other figures who stand in the background. Thus in *Andrea Del Sarto* Andrea reveals not only his own character but also that of his wife, Lucrezia. In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke reveals his own sordid nature, as well as the generous and gracious nature of the Duchess who is dead.

The Psychological Moment : The Critical Situation

As a painter of character, Browning is interested in representing the inner side of human beings, their mental and moral qualities. His poetry is the poetry of, "the great moment" or, "*the psychological moment*". He does not depict a complete human action, he does not give us a story moving rapidly towards a crisis ; rather he places his characters in the critical moment, the crisis of their lives, a psychological moment which stirs their whole personality, and by making them talk, by noting their reaction to the situation, reveals what goes on within their souls.

Internalisation of Action : No Chronological Development

That is why **Walter Pater** calls Browning's poetry, "**the poetry of situations**". 'The situation' is static, there is no external movement or action as in a drama. But there is intense internal movement ; events and incidents do take place, but they are entirely, "incidents within the soul". There is no chronological sequence of events, no inter-linking of events by the ordinary laws of cause and effect. Whatever unity there is, is emotional rather than logical. Placed in a critical situation—the crisis in his life—as the speaker is, he indulges in a process of self-analysis or self-examination, and in this way the readers get a peep into his soul. His motives and the impact of the crisis on his soul are thus highlighted. He is in a mood of self-revelation, and his thoughts range freely over the past, present and the future. It is in this way that the action that is already over, the events that happened in the past, are also brought in. As the speaker's mind sways backward and forward, the past and the future are both telescoped in the present moment. Instead of a straight-forward chronological movement, there is a zig zag backward and forward movement corresponding very closely to the actual thought processes. In this way, through the clash of ideas and motives the soul of the speaker is laid bare before the readers. *Browning thus achieves a higher and deeper reality, greater psychological varity than is possible for those who deal with the externals alone.*

The Technique of Psycho-analysis

In this connection writes **Frederick Ryland**, "Browning catches his characters in a cool moment of introspection or of guarded self-revelation, and he lets us see in their minds the causes and results of previous actions, as few other poets have been able to do." In his most successful poems, he presents a character in a condition of pause and makes clear to us by means of soliloquy or continued address how he got there. No one has ever given us pictures, so full of significant details, with such an intimate and convincing self-revelation. Thus in *The Last Ride Together*, 'the situation', facing the lover is the rejection of his love. In this moment of crisis, he has a ride with his beloved, their last ride together, indulges in detailed self examination and self-introspection, and so gradually his soul is laid bare before the readers. In *Andrea Del Sarto* again the critical moment

in the life of the painter has arrived. He must surrender his wife—with whom he is infatuated—to her lover who waits outside. In such, "a situation", the lover sits for a while alone with his beloved, Lucrezia, and through his self introspection we know what is happening to his soul. We realise why he neglected his parents, or why, despite all his skill, he has failed to rise to the greatest heights in his art. In several of his shorter poems, Browning selects or captures, "the moment", which is the result of quick thought or sudden passion and which results in some action which breaks the commonplace routine of life, and determines the future. For example, such is, 'the moment', 'the crisis' or 'the situation' in the *Flight of the Duchess*, and *Porphyria's Lover*.

Browning : Varied and Subtle Insight

It is in this way that, through a process of self-revelation, Browning vevifies his characters. A host of characters, *Cleon*, *Karsish*, *Sludge*, *Franceshini*, *Andrea*, *Bishop Blougram*, and above all that other Bishop who orders his tomb, stand out with startling vividness and plausibility. No doubt, in his later poems the psychologist is a little too prominent, he evinces, perhaps, an excessive interest in odd and abnormal types, and emphasises a little over-much antithetical attributes in a character. These faults are most obivious in poems like *Bishop Blougram's Apology* But making every allowance for such faults, we must acknowledge that he remains unrivelled in his studies of mental states, of moral crises, made from within. No other English poet, except Shakespeare, has shown such a varied and subtle insight into human character.

Apparent Sameness of His Characters : Its Reasons

Browning's art of character-portrayal has often been criticised for its sameness, or lack of variety. It has been said that his characters are all alike, that they are mere shadows of his own personality. It is said that his characters have no individuality, they are mere puppets through whose mouths the poet speaks. **Hugh Walker** replying to the charge writes, "In earlier years the characters really think their own thoughts and speak and act in accordance with them. It is true they speak in the voice of Browning, but their utterances are, as he declares, 'the utterances of so many imaginary personages.' His Pompilia, Caponsacchi, Andrea Del Sarto, Karshish, Paracelsus, Cleon, are beings endowed with characters distinct from the character of the poet, and he represents them dramatically. By their own speech they show what is in them. As a rule, it is otherwise in the closing period, in which the poet gradually ceases to be the dramatist and becomes the critic. Though the *dramatis personae* are brought on the stage, they are treated as puppets, not as living beings." Besides, there are two other reasons for this apparent similarity. First, the poet's style was strongly mannered and peculiar. Even when it is deftly modulated to suit particular characters, they seem to speak in the same way, for still, despite all modulations, Browning's style remains

Browningesque, too remote both from ordinary speech, and the style of other writers and poets. Secondly, Browning's chief interest lay in the depiction of the human soul, and the soul has always been very much the same in all ages, countries, and characters. That is why the poet does not often bother to give his characters a name. Thus the speakers in the *Last Ride Together*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *Evelyn Hope*, *The Grammarian's Funeral*, and a host of other poems have not been given any names. As one critic puts it, Browning's purpose is *"soul-dissection", and, "the human soul has remained much the same since the days of Adam".*

Conclusion : Browning's Originality

In his, "characteristic inwardness", in his exploitation of, "the Stream of Consciousness," technique for the depiction of character, Browning is the fore-runner of the modern impressionists. Great is his originality, and great is his contribution to the art of character delineation.

7

Browning and the Dramatic Monologue

or

The Technique of the Dramatic Monologue : Brownnig's Success

Browning's Dramatic Genius : His Failure on the Stage

Browning's genius was essentially dramatic. His dramatic bent of mind is seen in his characterisation, and in the unfolding of strong dramatic situations. He also considered the drama as the highest form of expre sion. He, therefore, took to writing plays for the public stage in right earnest and produced at least eight plays in a period of eight years. His first play *Strafford* was produced in 1837, and the last *In a Balcony* in 1844. By this date the poet was tired of writing for the stage, and turned to the Dramatic Monologue. This was so because his dramas were hopeless failures. He failed because his plays were deficient in action and lacked a sustained plot. A drama is essentially a representation of action, but in Browning's play the action is entirely internal. His real interest lay in soul-study, in introspection and psychological analysis, and so his plays were stage-failures. His dramatic skill, as well as his skill in painting, "interior landscapes," could be exercised to advantage in the Dramatic Monologue, and it was of this poetic form that he became the supreme exponent.

His Success with the Monologue : Its Causes

The Dramatic Monologue was used by Browning with amazing skill and success. As **Hugh Walker** points out, "Browning did not invent the dramatic monologue, but he made it specially his own, and no one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it." In these monologues, Browning had the chance, as Mrs. Browning hinted in *Aurora Leigh,*

> *"To outgrow*
> *The simulation of the painted scene,*
> *Boads, actors, promptors, gaslight and costume,*
> *And take for a noble stage the soul itself,*
> *In snifting actions and celestial lights,*
> *With all its grand orchestral si!ences,*
> *To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds.*

In other words, he could dispense with all, 'external machinery' of action and plot, and concentrate his attention on, "the incidents in the development of a soul". Unhampered by the limitations of the stage, he could now depict, "the phenomena of the mind". Browning made this form entirely his own, because it suited his genius, and also because it has a number of other advantages. It is an oblique or indirect mode of expression, and so the poet could freely express his views without fear of hostile critism. The views were expressed by other characters, and so they could not be imputed to him. Moreover, he knew that advice given directly, "glances off athwart the mind," while truths expressed indirectly set men thinking and so have their due effect. The form enabled him to exercise his dramatic bent freely, as well as to play effectively his role as a teacher.

The Dramatic Monologue : Defined and Explained

'The Dramatic Monologue' is, '*dramatic*', because it is the utterance of imaginery characters and not of the poet himself, and because in it character is developed not through any description on the part of the poet, but through a conflict between the opposite thoughts and emotions of the character himself. It is a, '*monologue*', because it is a conversation of a single individual with himself ('*Mono*' means '*one*', and '*logue*' means, '*conversation*'). The form is also referred to as *monodrama*. **T.S. Young** defines a dramatic monologue in the following words : "This is a kind of comprehensive soliloquy, absorbing into its substance by the speaker's keenly observant glance, the surrounding scenery and audience, bringing all that is pertinent to the chosen moment by the channels of memory, argument, curiosity and association ; adding through the deep-graven lines which habit has incised upon character much which the soul would fain conceal, and enriching the current of self-revealing speech with the product of any other emotion which may have been powerful enough to share in the fashioning of this critical moment."

The Drama and the Monologue

The salient features of the dramatic monologue are best brought out through a comparison and contrast both with the drama proper and the soliloquy. The dramatic monologue differs widely from the drama in its purpose and its method. In the drama the action is external ; in the monologue the action is entirely internal. *The thoughts and emotions of the individual character are the actors, and his soul is the stage.* The monoigue develops character not through outward action and conflict as in the drama, but through the clash of motives in the soul of the speaker, and with this end in view a moment of crisis is choosen, a moment when his personality is most active. It is for this reason that **Walter Pater** has called the poetry of Browning, "*the poetry of situations*". Again and again, in one monologue after another, the speaker concerned is placed in a critical situation, his reactions to it are analysed and dissected, and so the real worth of his character is brought out. Thus in the *Last Ride Together* the critical

situation is the lady's rejection of the lover, and it is the lover's reaction to this situation which forms the substance of the poem. Thus while in the drama there is action leading to a crisis, in the monologue the attention is concentrated on the crisis, and the past is unfolded only retrospectively. *There is no choronological sequence of events ; as the speaker's mind, in the process of self analysis, moves backwards and forwards at will, the past and the future are both telescoped in the present.* There are incidents, but they are incidents of the soul, and the unity between them is not logical, but emotional. As one critic puts it, *"whereas the view of life's reality in the drama is panoramic, in the monologue it is Kaleidoscopic."*

The Soliloquy and the Monologue

Similarly, the monologue is to be distinguished from the soliloquy. For one thing, the monologue is much longer than the soliloquy, thus allowing the poet fuller scope for character-portrayal, for the analysis of motives and emotions. The soliloquy is a sort of private debate, "a dialogue of the mind with itself," a speech of a person to himself when he is all alone, whereas a dramatic monologue implies the presence of some other character or characters, to whom it is addressed, and who listen to it, though they may not take part in it. This imparts to the monologue a conversational tone. Says **Allen Brockington,** "Some of the dramatic monologues are in the form of soliloquy, but the majority are conversational—that is to say there are listeners, and the presence of the listeners effects the talk. Often, the remarks of the listeners are indicated by the speaker's answers." In this way, the character not only of the speaker, but of the listener also is revealed. Explaining the difference between a soliloquy and a monologue, **Berdoe** in his *Browning Encyclopaedia* writes, "the dramatic monologue is entirely different from the soliloquy. In the later case, the speaker delivers his own thoughts, uninterrupted by the objections or the propositions of other persons. In the dramatic monologue, the presence of a silent second person is supposed, to whom the arguments of the speaker are addressed." Thus in *My Last Duchess* the listener is the messenger who has come to negotiate with the Duke a second marriage on behalf of his master's daughter ; in *Andra Del Sarto* the listener is the painter's beautiful wife, Lucrezia. This use of the conversational method is an important feature of the technique of Browning. *In this way, he has turned the soliloquy into a colloquy, or conversation.* As **W. L. Phelps** puts it, Browning's dramatic monologue, "is not a meditation, nor a soliloquy ; it is a series of remarks, usually, confessional, addressed either orally or in an epistolary form to a group of listeners. These other figures, though they do not speak, are necessary to the understanding of the monologue ; we often see them and see their faces change in expression as the monologue proceeds."

The Evolution of Browning's Technique : Early Monologues

The dramatic monologue was peculiarly suited to Browning's genius. As **Prof. Herford** points out, *"despite all his appetency for*

Drama, Browning did better work in his dramatic monologues than in his plays". He did not achieve success immediately ; his power and his technique envolved slowly but steadily till perfection was achieved. Though hints and traces of this form are to be seen even in such early poems as *Pauline, Paracelsus,* and *Sordello,* the form comes to full flowering in *The Dramatic Lyrics,* 1842. In this volume, two extraordinary little poems *Johannes Agricola* and *Porphyria's Lover* reveal not only an imagination of intense fire and heat, but an almost finished art—a power of conceiving subtle mental complexities with clearness, and of expressing them in a picturesque form and in perfect lyric language. Each poem renders a single mood, and renders it completely. But it is still only a mood ; *My Last Duchess* is a life. This poem is the first direct progenitor of *Andrea del Sarto* and the great blank verse monologues ; in it we see the form, fully developed. The poem is a subtle study in the jealousy of egoism—not a study so much as creation ; and it places before us, a typical Duke of the Renaissance, with his serene self-composure, his selfishness, his cruelty, and his genuine devotion to art. The scene and the actors in this little drama stand out before us with the most natural clearness. Browning's next more elaborate dramatic monologue is *Pictor Ignotos,* which was included in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics,* 1845. It is the first of the great, 'painting-poems', into which Browning has put so much of his finest art. It is a sort of first faint hint of *Andrea del Sarto* , perfectly individual and distinct though it is.

Maturity : The Middle Phase

Two more important dramatic monologues included in the above volume (*Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*) are *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed's Church* and *The Laboratory.* The former poem is the first monologue in blank verse. "Scarcely at his very best—scarcely in the very greatest monologues of the central series of *Men and Women*—has Browning exceeded this poem. As a study in human nature, it has concentrated truth and biting and imaginative realism. As a piece of metrical writing, it has all the originality of an innovation. If Browning can scarcely be said to have created this species of blank verse—half familiar, vivid with natural life, full of vigour and beauty, rising and falling, with the unerring motion of the sea, from depth to height, from height to depth, now level and smooth and shining, now rough with thickening foam, blown by the winds of passion and lulled with the falling breeze—if he has not exactly created it, he has certainly adapted, perfected, and made it a new thing in his hands. *The Laboratory* is a picturesque but terrible dramatic monologue, in which a Brinvilliers of the Ancient Regime is represented buying poison for her rival. It is one of the very finest examples of Browning's unique power of compressing and concentrating intense emotion into a few poignant words that move our souls to a perfect passion of terror and pity and sympathy.

The Perfection of His Technique

It is in his next volume, *Men and Women* (1855), that Browning's special instrument—the dramatic monologue—is brought to

perfection. Such monologues as *Andrea del Sarto* or *the Epistle of Karshish* never have been, and probably never will be surpassed. Even when dealing with a mere emotion, Browning usually crystallises it into a choice situation ; and almost every poem in the volume down to the smallest lyric, is essentially a dramatic monologue. Perhaps the most striking instances of the form and method, are the five blank verse pieces, *Andrea del Sarto, Fra Lippo Lippi, Cleon, Karshish and Bishop Blougram.* Each is a masterpiece of poetry. Each is in itself a drama, and contains the essence of a life, condensed into a single episode, or indicated in a combination of discourse, conversation, argument, soliloquy, reminiscence. Each, besides being the presentation of a character, moves in a certain atmosphere of its own, philosophical, ethical or artistic. *Andrea* and *Fra Lippo Lippi* in which Browning is at his best deal with art.

The Later Monologues : Increased Elaboration and Argumentation

While the other monologues are single minded, and represent the sincere and frank expression of the thoughts and opinions of their speakers, *Bishop Blougram's Apology* introduces a new element,—the case-making. *The Bishop's Apology* is, literally, a speech in defence of himself, in which the aim is to confound an adversary, not to state the truth. This form, intellectual rather than emotional, argumentative more than dramatic, has had a considerable attraction for Browning.

The larger part of Browning's next volume of poems, *Dramatis Personae*, 1804, also consists of dramatic monologues, which are rather elaborate and extented. Browning's next poem *Ring and the Book,* 1868-69, is the culmination of Browning's dramatic method, and the turning point, more decisively than *Dramatis Personae,* of his style It consists of twelve books. In form it is monodramatic, each book being a monologue. It embodies a single story, told ten times, each time from an individual standpoint, by nine different persons.

In the monologues of these volumes, Browning began to follow the trains of thought of his characters, and trace their prejudices and obsessions. The result is that with the *Dramatis Personae*, his monologues grow not obscure, but tortuous and labyrinthine. In the earlier monologues, Browning is primarily concerned with character portrayal ; in the later monologues, he is more occupied with case making. Hence his monologues tend to grow special pleadings in defence of his characters. The emotional and the lyrical is thus pushed out by argumentation and case making. The monologues tend to grow more intricate and subtle, and so more difficult to follow.

Browning's Technique : Its Salient Features

The rapid survey of Browning's monologues reveals his skill in the use of this form, as well as the distinctive features of his art and technique. He uses this form for the study of character, of particular mental states, and of moral crisis in the soul of the characters concerned. In these monologues, the poet depicts an amazingly wide variety of

characters, taken from all walks of life. Cowards, rogues, artists, scholars, Dukes, Cheats, beggars, murderers and saints like Pippa, all crowd his picture gallery. His characters belong not to any one country and age, but to a number of countries and ages. In each monologue, one character is at the centre, and the substance of the monologue consists of what passes within his soul. **Cazmian** calls them, "Soul reflectors" or, "studies in practical psychology", for they provide us with a peep into the inner working of the mind and soul of these characters. Besides these main figures, in each monologue there are some minor figures who are briefly but distinctly sketched with a few deft touches. They are the listeners for most of the time, but they also perform the dramatic function of the interlocutor from time to time, and thus provide the reason or the cause for the speaker's mood or his self-analysis. In this way, the monologue becomes a colloquy or a conversation. Thus in *Andrea Del Sarto*, Andrea is the speaker, Lucrezia is the listener, and her lover and the three rival artists are also introduced indirectly. In this way, in his monologues, Browning has distilled the very essence of some particular age,—its arts or the significant developments in its theology and its politics. From these studies, we can construct faithful pictures of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. Often the nature background is skilfully interwoven with the mood and temper of the speaker, and in this way the total effect is heightened. Thus in *Andrea Del Sarto*, the speaker's references to the Autumnal grey nature-background are used to heighten his own mood of depression and world weariness.

The Critical Situation : Its Impact on the Soul

In each monologue, the speaker is placed in the most momentous or critical situation of his life, and the monologue embodies his reactions to this situation. Unlike a dramatist, Browning does not begin slowly with an action leading to the crisis, rather he plunges headlong into the crisis. For this reason, his monologues have an abrupt, but very arresting opening, and, at the same time, what has gone before is suggested cleverly or brought out through retrospective meditation and reflection. Thus *My Last Duchess* opens with a reference to a picture of the dead Duchess, with clear indications that it is being shown to some one. Similarly, *Fra Lippo Lippi* has a very dramatic beginning. This abrupt beginning is followed by self introspection on the part of the speaker, and the whole gamut of his moods, emotions, reflections and meditations is given *The speaker's thoughts range freely over the past and the future, and so there is no logical and chronological development The past and the future are focused in the present, and the unity is emotional rather than logical.*

Brother's Language

The language of the monologues conforms closely to the thought-processes of the speaker concerned. It is the language of informal talk,—"brother's language," as Browning called it—and niceties of grammar and syntax are ignored. The language is often telegraphic, and the hesitancy and incoherence of the speaker is indicated by the

use of parentheses and dashes. The manner, too, is sometimes lyrical and emotional, sometimes narrative and descriptive, and at other times reflective and reminiscent, in keeping with the varying moods of the speaker. "It is worth noting", says **T.S. Young,** "that the monologues are written mostly in verse, free and vigorous in rhythm, racy and actual, bristling with colloquialisms".

Special Pleading : Case-Making

It has sometime been said that Browning's monologues are satires upon their respective speakers. But this is far from the truth. No doubt, the speakers expose their follies and their weaknesses, but as **Chesterton** points out *the monologues, "are not satires upon their subjects ; they are not even harsh or unfeeling exposures of them. They are defences."* *The Last Ride Together* is a defence of the lover, and *Andrea Del Sarto* offers an excuse for the painter's maltreatment of his parents. In his earlier monologues, Browning is primarily concerned with character portrayal ; in his later monologues, he is more interested in case-making. He is not content merely with seeking sinners, rather he tries to assert the essential humanity of even such sinners as Sludge, whom even sinners have cast out. With the passing of time, he grows more and more argumentative, more and more occupied with special pleading on behalf of his characters, and hence the monologues grow more elaborate and intricate. Consequently, he grows prosaic, dull and difficult to follow.

The Subjective Note

The monologues are 'dramatic', and as such they must be entirely objective. Browning is amazingly objective in some of them, but more often then not he betrays his own personal point of view. His philosophy of life, his views on God and the immortality of the soul, etc., can all be gathered from a study of his monologues. Such subjectivity is unavoidable in a verse-form which requires the poet, "to lend his own mind to his characters to enable them to defend their actions".

The Modern Note : Use of Impressionistic Technique

Hugh Walker rightly says, "These collections of Monologues form together one of the most precious and profoundly original contributions to the poetic literature of the nineteenth century. The defects which prevented his complete success in the regular drama are not apparent in this cognate form. He takes just what interests him, and consequently he is nearly always inspired, nearly always at his best." In his analyses of particular mental states, in his probings into the minds and hearts of the central characters of his monologues, in short, in his passion for psychoanalysis, Browning anticipates, to a very great extent, the modern, "stream of consciousness technique". Like the modern impressionists, Browning, too, focuses the past and the future in the present ; instead of giving us the orderly sequential development of thought, he ranges at will over vast stretches of time. His business is to render the soul or psyche of his protagonists, and so he follows the same technique as the modern impressionists. In his monologues, Browning constantly strikes a curiously modern note.

8

Browning and Tennyson : A Comparative Study

Or

Browning's Delayed Popularity : Its Reasons

The Two Kings of the Victorian Age

Browning and Tennyson are the two giants of the Victorian era. Both, roughly speaking, began creating at the same time and both towered head and shoulders above their contemporaries, from 1830 to 1890, practically the entire period of the reign of Queen Victoria. The formative years of their lives were passed in the very beginning of the new era, and the impulses thay received at the beginning of their career continued to inspire them all through. While the poetic methods and ideals altered around them, they remained curiously unaffected by it. The changes we notice in their work result from the natural growth of their own characters, from the maturity of their artistic powers, and from the decay of their powers with increasing age.

The Greater Aloofness of Browning

Their themes, their artistic methods, their view of God, man and his life, did not alter with the alteration in the views of their contemporaries. But Browning remained much more aloof from his age than did Tennyson. As is clear from *The Maud* and *The Princess*, the poet was influenced by the political and social events of those years. The new movements of science and criticism troubled Tennyson, as they did most of his contemporaries, like Arnold and Clough. Doubt and scepticism often overtook him, though he succeeded in shaking it off. His age is reflected in his poetry, but Robert Browning's poetry shows no awareness of contemporary social changes and trends which revolutionised both theology and religion. His *Paracelsus*, 1835, and *Asolando*, 1890, strike very much the same chords.

Browning : His Delayed Popularity

As a matter of fact, there cannot be two characters, two minds, and two poets more different from each other than were Tennyson and

Browning. Their public fate was singularly different. Tennyson was immediately popular with the publication of his *Collected Poems,* in 1842, and his popularity continued to increase, till with the publication of *In Memorium,* in 1850, he came to be regarded as the greatest poet of his time, and his poetry was read over the greater part of the English speaking world. His success and fame endured, and, he had a host of imitators. Browning's popularity, on the other hand, was delayed, and when it came, was limited only to a few, cultured readers. He had few imitators and followers. Even such great collection of poems as *Bells and Pomegranates,* a rare combination of music, of poetic pleasures, and of serious thought, failed to win over the public. *In Memorium* and *the Collected* edition of Browning's poems were published together, but their respective fates were entirely different. Browning continued to create, but to the end his poetry could receive only a limited appreciation. Browning was neglected, though, of course, he did not care the least for this neglect. "He loved his mistress art, and his love made him always joyful in creating" He was a true artist who creates only because he loves his art, and not for any other reasons.

Browning : His Greater Range and Variety

His recognition and popularity came, but they came only as late as 1870, twenty years after the publication of his *Collected Poems* in 1850. This means that Tennyson had fifty years of recognition and, Browning only ten. Their respective public fates were entirely different. Browning's delayed popularity is even more surprising, if we remember that his interests were Catholic and Cosmopolitan and that he renders in his poetry all types and phases of human nature, taken from different countries and climes. The range of his subjects is far greater than that of Tennyson ; and his artistic methods, too, are more varied.

Browning : A Man in Advance of His Age

The fact is that Browning was not a man of his age, but a man much in advance of his age. He was interested in soul-dissection, in the analysis of the human mind and art, in the study of man's motives and mental processes. *Paracelsus* and *Sordello* are soul dissecting poems, and so are many of the poems of *the Bells and Pomegranates.* This ruthless intellectual analysis of human nature was a part, in reality, of the scientific movement of the age. But Browning anticipated his age in this respect by thirty years. "So his poetry was not read at first ; but, afterwards, the world having reached him, he became a favoured poet" (**S A. Brooke**).

Secondly, Browning was not exclusively interested in the inner history of a soul, he was also interested in outward action. For example, *Sordello* combines with inner history, a tale of political and warlike action. In poems like *Pippa Passes,* emotion and thought are fused together in swift action. Nor are poems wanting, in which, instead of long analysis, there are short passions, fiery outbursts of

thought, rendered with astonishing itensity. Like the modern impressionists, he is concerned with sudden moments of human passion, with sudden, fleeting impressions on the senses. In other words, Browning anticipated impressionism by about forty years. He was an impressionist long before impressionism arrived and was recognised as such. In this respect, he stands alone among his contemporaries, for there is no impressionism in Tennyson, nor in Arnold or Morris or Rossetti. When impressionism arrived, his popularity was immediate and wide.

Thirdly, while Browning represents in his poetry the extraordinary complexity of human life, thought and emotion, Tennyson's smooth, melodious, simple development of his themes does not represent this clashing complexity of human life and nature. Nor is Arnold more successful in this respect. He is conscious of complexity and discord, but he tries to explain it rather than render it. Moreover, no other poet of the age, even when conscious of discord, does anything to resolve that discord. In the poetry of Browning alone, the discords and complexities are resolved into a full harmony of thought and emotion. Browning represented this complexity of life from the very beginning, and when society became conscious of this complexity, it was amazed to find that there was a poet who had been expressing it for the last forty years. They also found that in his poetry the discord of life is resolved into a concordant melody, that there was a core of peace and quiet in his poetry. And they found there was a poet who held out hopes of peace and harmony for the human soul, both for the individual and the race. This hope is the deepest element in Browning's religion. Tennyson, too, has this hope, but he is often uncertain and he often bewails this uncertainty. Browning was certain of this hope, and he does never waiver in his faith. Even when he fails to resolve some discord or complexity, he is certain that they can be resolved. In this respect again, he stands alone among his contemporaries. In the midst of the doubts, the uncertainties, the scepticism, the conflicts, and the contradictions of his age, he stands firm and unmoved. This firmness of his faith shows the strength of his character. In the beginning, the people cared only for the clash and the conflict, the discordant and jarring elements, which they found reflected in his poetry, but gradually they were attracted by the majestic harmony in which the discords were resolved. They turned to Browning in ever-increasing numbers, because they found in him poetic as well as religious satisfaction. His popularity came at the end of the 19th century, and it has increased ever since. "*Browning felt beforehand what we are beginning to hope for, and wrote of it fifty, even sixty years ago. No one cared then for him, but we care now.*"

Browning : More Profound and Original : His Message

While Browning had clear cut views of Man, Nature and God, and held firmly to them throughout his long career, Tennyson had no clear theory of Man, or God, or Nature. His views were formed

when he was young, and he did not change his views, like his contemporaries, upto the very end. He does not reflect from year to year the changing views of his time on these subjects. In this respect, he differs sharply from Tennyson. His views are original, at least in the form in which he has expressed them. Tennyson was always assailed by spiritual doubts and conflicts. Browning was always at peace, and firmly fixed in his views. The result was that while Tennyson could fully represent his age in all its doubts and scepticism, and so could impart greater variety to his works, Browning could not do so. But while Tennyson could not give to his age faith in God and humanity, the faith in a still centre, in the depths of the surface storms, we get such faith, and the consequent hope, in the poetry of Browning. He, alone of all his contemporaries, brings the message of hope, and the balm of consolation, for a faithless, trouble-tormented, and pessimistic humanity.

Greater Freshness and Variety

The unique feature of Browning's poetry is a rare combination of unity with diversity. The unity arises from his philosophy, from his religious theories, which are always the same. But despite this sameness of his views, there is no montony in his poetry, for there is also the immense variety of the subjects he chooses, and the scenery in which he places them. He may always repeat his theory, but he never repeats his examples. His subjects are taken from all ages of history, from all phases of human action, character, and passion, from all countries and classes of society, and from many periods of the fine arts. His themes are as many as his poems. Moreover, he had a youthful freshness which never deserted him ; impulsive as a child, he was always moved to poetry by the sudden, fleeting impressions that came to him from passing events or scenes. The transient scenes and sights of the day touched him to poetry. This again imparts variety to his poetry, and saves him from dullness or monotony, despite the sameness of his ground thought. His philosophy imparts, unity to the large bulk of his poetry, and yet he avoids monotony. "This also differentiates him from Tennyson, who often wanted freshness ; who very rarely wrote on a sudden impulse, but only after long and careful thought" (**S.A. Brooke**).

Browning's Superior Historical Sense

Browning had a remarkable sense of the past, the historical sense. He could combine accuracy of knowledge with imaginative treatment. He gives us accurate and vivid pictures of human life and passions placed in a remote setting and age, and governed by the circumstances of that age. Thus his *Sordello* is the history of a soul, with all its scenery and history vividly medieval ; his *Grammarian's Funeral* vividly paints a historical period, and *The Ring and the Book* brings to life the dead world of ancient Rome, and renders the very soul of that remote age. He is equally successful in rendering the periods and phases of art history, or religious history. Each of the poems *Fra*

Lippo Lippi, *Andrea Del Sarto* and *Abt Vogler*, "is an accurate piece of art-history, with the addition to it of the human soul.". "Never, in poetry, was the desire of the historical critic for accuracy of fact and portraiture, combined with vivid presentation of life, so fully satisfied." In this respect, Tennyson was for his inferior. His Greek and medieval poems are modernised, and his imagination is uncritical. He fails to capture the spirit of the age, as does Browning.

His Greater Originality

There is another contrast between the two : Browning is by far the more original of the two poets. Tennyson began his career with imitation ; he wrote in the beginning in the strain of the sentimental poets of 1822 to 1832. He achieved originality, his own distinctive method, only gradually. Browning, on the other hand, sprang into originality with his very first poem *Pauline*. The poem has its faults, but even in his faults Browning is fresh and distinct. The matter, the spirit, the verse-movement, of the poem are his own. He may show influences and admirations, but there is never any imitation. His dominant individuality separates him from Tennyson.

A Greater Emancipator of the Human Spirit

Further, Tennyson is conventional and conservative ; Browning, on the other hand, does not care for any conventions or social codes of conduct. Tennyson belonged to a certain class of English society, and he rarely got out of it in his poetry. He was always a slave to what is proper and recognised, and so lacks distinctness and freedom of personality. Browning as an artist is quite free from such restraints. His poetry belongs to no special creed, or class of society, or morality. He said what his own thought and emotion urged him to say, with absolute carelessness about the opinion of the world. In this respect, he represents a reaction against the tyranny of custom and tradition. In this way, he set free the human soul from the restraints of convention, and lifted it to a higher level. Browning is a great emancipator of the human soul, while Tennyson is not. This accounts for the increased popularity of Browning with the loosening of Victorian taboos and conventions.

Browning a Cosmopolitan : Tennyson Insular and National

Further, while Tennyson was insular, a distinctively English poet and a patriotic poet, Browning was a cosmopolitan and internationalist. Tennyson's pride in England made him narrowly nationalistic, and he looked down with contempt upon other countries. He shared the English prejudices towards France, Ireland, Scotland, and other countries of Europe. His natural scenery, too, is of his own land, particularly of the place where he resided. When he took war as his subject, he took it exclusively from the history of his own country. There is no trace in his works of the national struggles of any other country. Browning, on the other hand, never displays any special patriotism. Rather, he is more Italian than English. He sympathises

with the national characteristics, aspirations and struggles of countries like Spain, France, Germany, and above all Italy. "There are scarcely three poems in the whole of the seven numbers of the *Bells and Pomegranates* which even refer to England. Italy is there and chiefly Italy. His scenery is not the scenery of England, but of several countries ; above all it is Italian, and vividly Italian" His most moving poems are those which treat of war, and the struggles of other countries, and not of his own. "It was not that he did not honour his country, but that as an artist, he loved more the foreign lands ; and that in his deepest life he belonged less to England than to the world of men" (**S.A. Brooke**).

Superior to Tennyson in Wit and Humour

Browning was a cosmopolitan who was more interested in the universal, rather than in the national or the topical. It was an era of great changes in science and theology, and the age also witnessed the rise of democracy. But these movements are not reflected in his works as they are reflected in the works of Tennyson, and this fact may also account for his delayed popularity. He had greater love for Italian Art and literature than for the English, and when he sings of common life—the life of a farmer, a sailor, a shepherd—or of love-making, it is, with rare exceptions, of some foreign country. His pathos and his passion for the infinite are Italian. But despite all this, the English elements in his works and in his character are more than the Italian, or of any other foreign country. His intellect was English and his faults and excellences are characteristically English. His optimism, his fighting spirit, his energy are all English. His religion is the English religion of compromise, his bold sense of freedom is English, and his constancy to his theories is English. His English patriotism, his pride in his own country, breaks out in all its fullness and fervour in one of the sonnets of the sequence *Home Thoughts from the Sea*. His wit, his play, so high fantastical, with his subject, and the way is which the pleasure he took in this play overmastered his literary self control ; his fantastic games with metre and rhyme, his want of reverence for the rules of his art, his general lawlessness, are all English. In this respect—in his wit and in his humour—he beats Tennyson out of field.

Browning : His Greater Catholicity, and Faith in Human Nature

Browning was a complex character, one whose personality was made up of different racial elements. Thus there was much that was Jewish in his intellect and character. His faith in an ever victorious Righteousness at the centre of the universe, his Metaphysical minuteness, his fondness for remote and unexpected analogies, his illustrations and legends, his love of loud, bright colours, his love of music and the other fine arts, are all characteristically Jewish. In numerous poems like *Rabbi ben Ezra*, he has written of the Jews with deep feeling. "No English poet", says **S.A. Brooke**, "save Shakespeare,

has spoken of the Jew with compassion, knowledge and admiration, till Browning wrote of him." Tennyson was not complex, he did not have the catholicity of Browning. He was English and only English. No English poet has been so distinctively English as Tennyson, and none of them so outside of England as Browning. This is another reason why Browning was not read in his age, but received recognition and fame only with the closing years of the century. It has increasingly been recognised that the key of human progress and well-being lies in internationalism rather than in nationalism. Faith in the essential unity of man has grown, and this faith is expressed in all its intensity in the poetry of Browning. In this respect again, Browning is in advance of his age. Tennyson has nothing of this faith.

Browning More Universal Than Tennyson

As far as the social and political problems of the day are concerned, Tennyson frankly and clearly makes us know his views. Thus we know from his poetry his reverence for the English Constitution ; we know from it his views on such question as the woman's question, war, competition, education, marriage, freedom, etc. Browning differs from Tennyson, and differs sharply in this respect. He does write of political and social problems, but he simply renders them in his poetry, he does not express his own views about them ; he takes no side. And he writes of these problems more with reference to other countries than his own country. He writes of ideas and ideals which should govern men in their relations with each other rather than of particular social problems of the day. On the whole, he avoids the topical and the ephemeral and concentrates on the universal and the general. Browning rises above the merely contemporary, and hence his appeal has been far more enduring than that of Tennyson.

Browning and Tennyson as Poets of Man

As poets of human nature, the two stand wide apart. Tennnyson is the poet of human nature in its noble, common, and loving forms, as Browning is the closest to what is complex, subtle and uncommon in human nature. He renders the complex, the abnormal, the unusual and the unnatural, and so his appeal is a limited one. Not that he does not deal with what is noble, simple and loving in man, but the treatment of the remote, the uncommon, the subtle and the involved is more characteristic of him. No doubt, he strove to paint human nature in the whole, and it is for this reason that his picture of humanity and human life is more varied, detailed and extensive than that of Tennyson, but the complex and the uncommon predominates, and often makes his rendering dull and prosaic. It was in his nature to do so, and he has done it well. But the representtation of the complex, the remote, and the obscure, is the work of the intellect, and it makes much of his poetry, specially later poetry, no better than rhythmical prose. Browning does often render the simple and the loving in human nature—and such poems are among his

masterpieces—but Tennyson does so more frequently and characteristically.

Browning : a Lesser Artist

Then again, Browning, on the whole, is a lesser artist than Tennyson. A good poem must have a lovely form. In other words, it should have a noble style, harmonious composition, varied but at unity, and a sweet melody and versification. Browning's composition is rarely careful. More often than not, it is broken up and overcrowded, as too many side issues and digressions are introduced. There is lack of artistic selection and ordering of material, everything that comes to the poet's mind is haphazardly introduced, and so the main impression is weakened. His writing, on the whole, is the result of intellect rather than of passion. Tennyson's composition is always excellent and careful.

The Greater Clarity of Tennyson

Browning, no doubt, has an individual style, entirely original and devoid of all imitation. He is an original artist and in this respect more interesting than Tennyson. But Browning did not take care of his style, he ignored the rules of his art, and his freedom often degenerated into licence. He is often fantastic and grotesque. It is if he did not care for the public, nor for his art. He carelessly flung what he wrote at the head of his readers. His capriciousness is carried to an extreme, and beauty is lost. Further, he lacks clarity, and he is obscure not from any depth of thought. but from sheer laziness and caprice. He makes even the easy, difficult. He is difficult not by this thought, but by his expression of it. Tennyson like other great poets is clear. He puts the right word in the right place, but Browning finds pleasure, so to say, in continually putting his words into the wrong places. He leaves out words, leaves his sentences unfinished, and over-loads what he writes with parentheses. No doubt, style is the man, and much of Browning's power lies in his style, but he carries it to an excess. A little care, a little control over his fancy, would have made his poetry better and more enduring. Oddities of his style may be necessary to express the oddity of human nature and circumstance, but still they are over-done and so detract from his greatness.

Browning : Disregard of Music and Melody

As far as melody and versification are concerned, Browning is negligent in this respect also. He needlessly and frequently sacrifices it to his thought. He takes pleasure in the quaint oddities of sound, in jarring tricks with the metre, in fantastic and difficult arrangements of rhyme, in the systematic use of double rhymes, and often sacrifices melody and sweetness of versification. His work is intellectual he is concerned with the travail of the soul, but these are

qualities of prose, and not of poetry. There are a number of poems in which there is sweet melody, and discord is resolved into concord, there are others which express phases of human passion, and posterity will judge the greatness of Browning on the basis of such poems. Poems like *Abt Vogler* and *Paracelsus* will always give pleasure to man, but there are countless others which lack such power, dignity, beauty, and sweetness of sound. Tennyson has much more of this nobleness of composition ; his work is uniformly poetic, and so he must certainly be ranked as a greater artist, though not such a original one as Browning.

9

Browning : Treatment of Nature

His Originality as a Nature-poet

Browning's treatment of Nature is original and distinctive in many ways, like most other aspects of his art. It may show the influence of earlier poets, as that of Shelley in *Pauline*, but he does never imitate. His minuteness of observation, his love of colour, his impressionistic way of description, the breadth and freshness of his landscapes, and their gorgeous Italian splendour, his love of colourful flowers and animals, his eye for grotesque and fantastic details, and his attitude towards nature, are all entirely his own. In his nature-treatment, he stands apart from other nature-poets of the 19th century.

Nature, a Window to God

In Browning's poetry, the world of leaves and flowers rarely reflects human thoughts and emotions, as it does in other poets, say in Tennyson. Nature exists independently of man ; she exists in her own right as a separate entity. Nature is there to teach us not herself, but what is beyond herself. Nature shows forth her glory to us not to keep us with herself, but to make us aspire to rise upwards to the Infinite, God, who is the source both of Nature and of Man. The beauty of nature is for Browning an expression of the glory and splendour of God, and when face to face with the grandeur of Nature, he feels as if he were face to face with the Infinite. Nature is for Browning a window to God.

Joy in Nature : Her Separate Identity

Browning finds joy widely interfused in all Nature. This is so because the different objects of nature are but an expression of the creative joy of God, the delight which He finds in the act of creation. Nature is one form of this Creative Joy, and man another. Browning does not conceive of any pre-conceived harmony between Man and Nature, as does Wordsworth. It is, therefore, rarely that he humanises nature, i.e. speak of nature in human terms. The use of what Ruskin calls, "*Pathetic Fallacy*", is rare in Browning. Even when it does occur, even when he speaks of nature in human terms, he takes

care to make it plain that Nature is quite distinct from us. For example, take the following passage from *James Lee's Wife* :

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning ! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet,
For the ripple to run over in its mirth ;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones,
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

In this passage, says **S.A. Brooke**, "The smile, the mirth, the listening, might be said to impute humanity to nature, but the Earth and the Sea are plainly quite distinct from us. They are great giant creatures who are not ourselves, Titans who live with one another and not with us ; and the terms of our humanity are used to make us aware of their separate existence from us, not of their being images only of our mind." The smile of Nature is a, "gigantic smile", different from human smile : Browning separates us altogether from the elemental life of those gigantic beings. He uses, "pathetic fallacy", only to emphasise this separateness.

Nature an Elemental Being

God created Nature for the joy he takes in creation, but God and Nature were alone together countless years before Man was born. Man is the close of all, the great seal which God has put on His Creation. Man is not nature ; nature is a separate unhuman form of God. She exists apart, but God in her may sometimes speak to the God in us. She might sometimes take a little interest in us, but it is not the interest of a man for man. It is a sort of unhuman interest, like that of Ariel in Prospero and Mirande. It is an elemental interest, quite different from human interest. Says **S.A. Brooke**, "She has, then, a wild, unhuman, unmoral, unspiritual interest in us, like a being who has an elemental life, but no soul". Occasionally, when we are loving and on the verge of joy, she takes a deeper interest in us, actually works for us, and helps us to achieve the fullness of joy. But even in such moments, the interest is unhuman, like that of Puck and Oberon, the Fairy-king, in the loves of Helena and Hermia. Thus in the poem *By the Fireside*, the lovers are brought together in a fullness of love by nature. But even in such moments, Browning takes care to emphasise the separateness of Nature :

It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.

Nature Unsympathetic to Man

And such moments are extremely rare, for it is rarely that we are in the blessed mood of unself-conscious joy and love. Mostly, we are out of harmony both with love and joy, or engrossed in worldly activity, and then Nature, wholly unsympathetic, mocks and plays with us like a fawn. For example, in *Sordello*, as Sordello climbs the ravine, thinking of himself as Apollo, the wood, "proud of

its observer", a mocking phrase, "tries surprises on him, stratagies and games". Generally, we are too mean and small for her greatness, and so we,

> *Quail before a quiet sky*
> *Or Sea, too little for their quietude.*

Her Total Apartness

In *the Englishman in Italy*, too, Nature manifests her apartness from man. "The mountains know nothing of his soul ; they amuse themselves with him ; they are angry with him for his intrusion ;" there is no question of their sympathy for him. In Browning's poetry there is total apartness of Nature from us. "Nature mocking, surprising us ; watching us from a distance, even pleased to see us going to our destruction" (**S.A. Brooke**). Nature may be alive in Browning, but it is never humanised, and never at one with us. In this Browning is distinct from other poets of the century. Browing makes it perfectly clear that, "Nature has no human attributes, she merely seems to us to have such attributes, because man, throws back his soul and his soul's life on all the grades of inferior life which preceded him." Human attributes of nature are not her own ; they result from the imagination of man. This point has been explained in detail in a celebrated passage in *Paracelsus.*

Nature Merely a Background to Human Action

Nature is not dead ; she is alive. But she has a distinct personality of her own, her own separate joys and sorrows. Because he conceives of nature as a distinct being, he can describe her vividly and accurately and without clouding the description, like Tennyson, with the mist of human emotion and sentiment. But this does not mean that humanity or human feelings are absent from the nature-descriptions of Browning. In his poetry, the human element is not in nature but in him, in what he thinks and feels, in what nature awakens in him. It is nature which influences man and his feelings and not *vice versa*. Browning does not care much for nature divorced from human life ; nature has value for him only as a background to human action and passion. "She is of little importance unless man be present and then she is no more than the scenery in a drama." Thus in *A Lover's Quarrel* Nature is beautiful, but the poet finds even, "*the blue, grey, because his love is away.*" There is excellent nature-description, but it is only scenery, for the real passion is in the poet's mind. *By the Fireside*, an excellent piece of nature-description, illustrates the same point. Browning loves man, and he finds no joy and Nature, for her own sake.

Nature : A Storehouse of Images

Like other poets, Browning, too, uses nature as a store-house of images to illustrate the doings, thinking, and character of man. He has done this with remarkable success in *Sordello*. The rich poetic

soul of Sordello is compared to the luxuriant vegetation of Italy, and we get the famous line, "And still more labyrinthine tends the rose." In this way, the whole essence of a great artist's nature is conveyed. In countless such other comparisons, minute and accurate, and of great charm, the poet conveys the close seeming resemblance between man and nature. The resemblance is only seeming and not real, Nature may be human-like, but it is not human. The only human passion which he finds existing in nature, is the passion of joy, the result of the Creative joy of God. The poet is conscious of the joyful rush of life in nature, and, "*no poet ever felt this ecstasy of mere living in nature more deeply than Browning.*" This note of rapture is struck by the poet again and again, and at such moments he becomes a living part of Nature herself, rejoicing in the mightier life of the world of leaves and flowers. The point is well-illustrated by *Aristophane's Apology.*

Italian Inspiration : Predilection for Beginnings

Browning's love of nature is cosmopolitan. Nature in his poetry is not of one country, but of many countries. It is more of Italy than of England. Indeed, an English landscape has been painted in his poetry only twice or thrice. His nature-descriptions have all the gorgeousness and splendour of nature in Italy. Some of them are perfect riots of colour. Thus in *Pippa Passes* there is a glorious outburst of light, colour and splendour :

Day !
Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last !
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud cup's brim,
Where spurling and suppressed it lay,
For not a froth flake touched the rim
Of yonder gap in the solid gray
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away ;
But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.

The passage also illustrates Browning's predilection for beginnings—the beginning of the day, the beginning of spring, etc

His Eye for Colour

The above passage gives an account of a glorious and colourful sunrise, but he is equally at home in painting a crimson sunset :

That autumn eve was stilled
A last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand
The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
From all Verona cared for the soft sky.

Browning's love of colour is extraordinary, greater than that of any other English poet. Sometimes, as **Ruskin** puts it, "*it is not colour, it is conflagration.*" Wherever, the colour may be, in a flower, at the edge of a cloud, or on the back of a Lizard, Browning is sure to observe it and convey his own pleasure in it to his readers. "It is his love of colour which made at least half of the impulse that drove him at times into impressionism." *He draws as well as paints. He saw things in colour, and his colour-impressions are conveyed vividly to his readers.*

His Landscapes : Their Realism and Accuracy

Browning does not invent ; he paints what he has actually seen. He drew directly from Nature. This accounts for the remarkable accuracy and minuteness of his landscapes. The landscapes in *Pauline* and *Sordello* are recollections of what he had seen and noted in his memory. He was a keenly observant man, with a retentive memory. He could convey the exact atmosphere, the exact feel of things, the exact impressions he had formed years earlier. For example, in *The Grammarian's Funeral*, with a wonderful power, "Browning makes us feel the air grow keener, fresher, brighter, more soundless and lovelier." All this is conveyed by the verse, it is a triumph in Nature-painting. And the poem also illustrates the poet's ability to make his readers see the widening and expanding of a landscape. To convey this sense of expansion through verse is a remarkable achievement. The *Flight of the Duchess* brings before our minds' eye league after league of wide-spreading landscape. The sky is repeatedly brought in to heighten this sense of expansion and vastness. Thus in *Christmas-Eve*, we get the description of the rainbow, as clear, vivid and natural as can be. Browning's predilection for skyscapes is accounted for by his sojourn in Italy, for there the scenery of the sky is more superb and gorgeous than that of the earth.

Miniature-painting : Human Emotion

Browning is equally at home and effective in painting narrow-landscapes, and in the description of small shut-in places of Nature. In *By the Fireside*, each verse stands as a picture by itself. It is one of Browning's favourite ways of description, to walk slowly through the landscape, describing step by step those parts of it which strike him, and leaving us to combine the parts into the whole. But his way of combination is to touch the last thing he describes with human love, and to throw back this atmosphere of feeling over all the pictures he has made. There is no mere dry cataloguing of the various objects of nature that strike the poet's fancy, "but shooting through them, like rays of light, there are either his own fancies or thoughts, or the fancies or thoughts of some typical character whom he invented." They are countless such miniature-paintings in Browning's poetry, but sometimes the picture is larger and nobler and the nature-object described is charged with power, terror or dignity. Thus in *Pippa*

Passes the terror of the fierce Italian thunderstorm is enhanced by its being treated as the messenger of God's vengeance :

> *Burried in woods we lay, you recollect ;*
> *Swift ran the searching tempest overhead ;*
> *And ever and anon some bright white shaft*
> *Burned thro' the pine-tree roof, here burned and there,*
> *As if God's messenger thro' the close wood screen*
> *Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,*
> *Feeling for guilty thee and me ; then broke*
> *The thunder like a whole sea overhead.*

His Love of Animals

Browning is essentially a poet of man, and his landscapes are landscapes with human figures. He is never tired of recording with delight and accuracy the work done by different classes of men, specially the doings of humble peasantry. Besides human figures, his landscapes are thickly populated with animal life. Indeed, no English poet has a greater love of animals than Browning, nor does any one else describe them so frequently, so carefully, and so vividly. The largeness of his range in this respect is amazing : from the river-horse to the lizard, from the eagle to the wren, from the loud singing bee to the flying insect in the sun shine.

His Descriptions of Animal Life

In *Caliban upon Setebos*, as would naturally be the case, animal-life is everywhere ; and how close to truth, how keenly observed it is, how the right points for description are chosen to make us feel the beast and bird in a single line, how full of colour, how flashed into words which seem like colours, the descriptions are, any animal-lover may hear in the few lines I quote :

> *You otter, sleek wet, black, lithe as a leach :*
> *You auk, one free eye in a ball of foam*
> *That floats and feeds ; a certain badger brown*
> *He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye*
> *By moonlight.*

That is enough to prove his power. And the animals are seen, not as a cultured person sees them, but as a savage, with his eyes untroubled by thoughts, sees them : for Browning, with his curious self-transmuting power, has put himself into the skin of Caliban.

The Evolution of His Nature-treatment : His Love of the Grotesque

Browning's treatment of nature, like his total genius, underwent a slow process of evolution. From the beginning, he paints in his own way, rather than imitate. In *Pauline* we get more natural description for its own sake than in any other of the poems which followed. In this poem alone there is much direct, detailed

description. He got out of this elaborate way of nature-painting quite early, and in his later poetry the significant in nature is painted by a few sharp, high-coloured words, and the rest is left to the imagination of the readers. As his powers mature, he suggests much more than he describes. The odd, the strange, and the grotesque continued to please him upto the end, and he could not resist the temptation to introduce it, even though it had no natural relation to the matter in hand. In *Paracelsus* which followed, nature is introduced not for its own sake but merely as a scenic background to human activity and human emotion. The poet's powers have matured, he has acquired sureness of touch, but such grotesquery as the following one, spoils an otherwise good passage :.

Yet see how that prickly star-shaped plant,
Half-down in the crevice, spreads its wooly leaves,
All thick and glistening with diamond dew.

His Nature-love : Its Decay

In the next important nature-poem, *Sordello*, nature is not introduced for its own sake, it reflects human emotions, or illustrates his passions and his thoughts. His grasp is clear and firmer, and his love of colour is almost Venitian. From *The Ring and the Book* onwards nature decayed in the poetry of Browning. Man masters it and drives it out ; the human passion is so powerful that it consumes Browning's interest in the external world. Hence forward, Nature is neglected and the poet gives himself upto the representation of the odd and the grotesque in humanity. He is more and more occupied with intellectual analysis, nature has ceased to awaken the poetic passion in him, and his poetry grows poorer and lifeless. In this respect *Fifine at the Fair* is an exception ; it has a number of nature-passages of great beauty, specially the one, describing a sunset. The decay of Browning's love of nature is also a decay of his poetry. In his next book *Pacchiarotto* he recovered his love of Nature, but it was only for a moment. Gradually, he ceased to care for Nature ; having once divorced nature and humanity, he could never bring them together. It would have been better for his poetry, if he had not forgotten nature in anatomising man. In the first half of his poetry, love of nature and humanity are so interfused that nature suggests to him humanity and humanity Nature. At this time, he wrote his best poetry. Later on, his love of humanity pushed out his love of Nature, with the result that he lapsed into intellectual or ethical exercises, and his poetry degenerated into prose. *The decay of Browning's love of Nature, is the decay of his poetry as well.*

10

Browning as a Love-Poet

Or

The Love Theme in Browning's Poetry

The Greatness of Browning as a Love Poet

Chesterton, in his fine monograph on the poet, calls Browning, "*the greatest of love-poets*", and his poetry the, "*finest love-poetry in the world*", as well as the, "*truest of love-poetry*". His *Dramatic Lyrics*, published in 1842, heralded the advent of Browning the love-poet, for in this collection, "the best and most characteristic of the poems are love-poems ; they express almost to perfection the real wonderland of youth".

Youthful, Passionate Love

Browning began writing love-poetry early in his career, and continued to write of love upto the very end. His last work *Asolando*, published on the very day of his death, contains a number of love-poems which describe the passion of sexual love with surprising intensity. "They are fully charged with this isolated emotion ; other thoughts than those of love do not intrude upon them" (**Brooke**). Poems like *Now, Summum Bonum, A Pearl*, and *Speculative*, "are full of that natural abandonment of the whole world for one moment with the woman loved," which youth alone can feel. That Browning could treat of impassioned, youthful love even in his old age is in itself sufficient to establish his greatness as a love-poet. Others have treated of passionate, sexual-love in their youth ; Browning is unique in his successful treatment of it even in old age.

Treatment both of Physical and Spiritual Love

Sexual love considered as a passion has two aspects—it is spiritual as well as physical. Browning does not frown upon the physical aspects of love. Indeed, when at his best, the physical and the spiritual meet in his love poetry, each in its pre-eminence. For him, the brightest truth, the purest truth in the universe, often lies "in the kiss of a girl". In one poem after another, he celebrates the earthly love as well as the spiritual one. In *A Pearl* and *By the*

Fireside express strong, earthly, and sensuous love, as well as love of the spirit, when one look, one word, from the woman opens the infinite world of love for the lover. For a moment with the beloved, the lover is prepared to surrender all—Heaven, Nature, Man, Art, and Life itself *Momentariness is the very essence of some of the best love poems of Browning.* In his treatment of love, Browning differs from the other Victorians who recoiled from the flesh and looked upon it as an obstacle in the way of the development of the human soul. It is a measure of his realism that he does not disregard the claims of the body ; rather he regards physical passion as essential for a happy married life, and as a means to spiritual development. His concern is with the harmonious development of human personality. This can be possible only through love which is both sensuous and physical.

Browning's Realism : Use of the Commonplace

Browning's realism in the treatment of love is seen in another way also : he does not use the ideal imagery of most poets of love. The imagery in his love poems is drawn from, "suburban streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos, window-blinds, burnt cork, fashionable fur coats" (**Chesterton**). In this way, he expresses the essential, insatiable realism of the passion of love. Browning does not talk about obstructions or about ideals and generalisations, he deals with window-panes and gloves and garden walls—objects and places associated with the beloved or with a moment of love. Though Evelyn Hope's lover refers to her auburn hair and her geranium red mouth, it is seldom that Browning talks of love or of the beauty of the beloved. Rather, he writes of, "the celestial time when a man does not think about heaven, but about a parasol." That is why his poetry awakens in every man the memories of those immortal moments with the beloved when common and dead things acquire a meaning, "beyond the power of any dictionary to utter, and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to compute." It is the dress of the beloved in *A Lover's Quarrel* which takes hold of the spirit. Browning stands unique among English love-poets in bringing out the value and significance of momentary, but immortal sights and sounds, as a gesture, an old song, a portrait, a piano, an old door, etc. As **W T. Young** puts it, "He treats of actual passdon, and he stays at whatever moment in its course promises to distill its richest significance". Hence his realism, and the novelty of the situations in his love-poetry.

Love : Its Intellectual Analysis

Though, as pointed out above, the poet has dealt in a few poems with romantic, passionate love, more characteristic of him is the intellectual study of the emotion of love. He is more concerned with the psychology of love than with the passion of love or with that abandonment and exclusiveness which comes natural to youth and love. In one poem after another, his lovers dissect and analyse their passion. For example, the lover in *The Last Ride Together*

thinks less of his beloved than of his own success and failure in love, and derives consolation from the fact that success is rare in life. *He intellectualises love : "the emotion of love is always entwined with grave questions of life and conduct."* He is more concerned with the consequences of love than with love itself. This detracts a little from Browning's greatness as a love-poet.

The Power of Love

In his best love poems, he brings out the power of love to lift the lover to a higher and nobler level and give him new strength, as in *By the Fireside*, or sink him to the lower level of sensuous slavery, as in *Andrea Del Sarto.* Love is the one thing essential for the fulfilment of life ; without love even power and knowledge have no significance. *Paracelsus* and *Sordello* fail because they ignore love. In his poetry, love reveals character, as well as puts it to the test of fire. **As O Elton** puts it, "*Browning considered that love is not only man's chief happiness, but his chief ordeal.*"

Personal Love-poetry : Married-love

Browning's love-poetry may broadly be divided into two categories, the personal and the dramatic, and the personal poems are far out-numbered by the dramatic. His genius was essentially dramatic, and the expression of personal emotion requires the lyrical bent. That is why though he knew personal love, fully and intensely, it is expressed only in a few poems. These poems of personal love are the fruits of Browning's passionate love for his wife, Elizabeth, and the happy married life which he led with her. The poems testify to the ennobling and inspiring influence of true and sincere love over the genius of a poet. *By the Fireside* is one of the finest poems of married love in the English language. Sitting silently with his wife by the fireside, the poet muses on their married life and on the blessings which her love has bestowed upon him. It is a remarkably vivid picture of a peaceful and satisfied married life, full of sweet memories and images of his wife. *One Word More* is another equally finished work of art, full to the brim with the long experience of peaceful joy in married life. *Prospice*, written after the death of Elizabeth Browning, tells us what she has made of him, reveals his steadfastness in love, and his resolve to be a fighter upto the very end. The poem ends with the poet's optimistic faith in the certainty of his meeting her in the life after death. "Browning at his best, Browning in the central fire of his character, is in it :"

> *Then a light, then thy breast,*
> *O thou soul of my soul, I shall clasp thee again,*
> *And with God be the rest.*

Impersonal Love-poetry : Its Immense Variety

A large majority of Browning's poems of love are impersor Such poems are dramatic. In these poems, Browning often deals

vitally critical love situations, and gives the reactions of the men and women concerned. In this way, the poet deals with love in all its manifold variety, in all its changing moods, vagaries, certainties, failures and conquests. *Browning has the unique distinction of being the only English poet who has dealt with love in all its multitudinous complexities ; very wide is the variety of love situations taken up by the poet.* His own love was eminently successful ; but even then he has dealt with the tragedy of love, the frustrated and unfulfilled love, with equal insight and penetration.

His Love-situations : Their Novelty

T.S. Young is right when he says, "It is another evidence of the poet's curiously dramatic instinct that whilst his own love ran so unhesitating and propitious a course, he should have explored so often the eddies and back-waters and torrents in the current of love." It is not sufficient for him to pen, "descriptions of the fairest wights," or to find exquisite diction and imagery to figure forth a mood, such as the song for Mariana, "*Take, O, take those lips away*" ; nor does he, like Donne, pry into the weird secrets of the past. He treats of actual passion and he stays at whatever moment in its course promises to distil its richest significance. He seems almost the first to realize that these moments are not necessarily those of the rapture of possession and enjoyment, or the fierce bitterness of rejection, but may be any one of the scores of episodes in the long chronicle. *Hence the novelty of the situations is his love poetry.* And again, he stands apart from other love poets because romance and passion rarely came singly to him ; his curious, examining intellect led him to segregate all the strands of the mood, to trace it back to its origins, and to peer forward to its outcome.

The Tragedy of Love : Manliness of His Lovers

Browning portrays failure in love as in *Cristina or The Lost Mistress* or in *The Last Ride Together* or in a host of other poems. Failure in love is not an occasion for some tempestuous outburst of grief, but rather, "for the manliness of temper which gathers strength out of defeat, weaves the exprience into the fabric of character and imbues its resignation with new thought and resolve for other ventures." Says **T.S. Young** : "*The tragedies of love are for Browning's women, rather than for his men.*" The inconstancy he pictures is that dreaded by a wife after her husband's death, as in *Any Wife to Any Husband*, or of one who is constantly endeavouring to seize the hem of the garment of fidelity, but in vain as in *Two in the Compagna.* No poet falls so rarely into sentimentalism.

Poems of Wifehood and Motherhood

Browning is not always the poet of love faltering or baffled. "He can pipe as melodiously as any Elizabethan a song in praise of beauty. He can find words, too, for the splendid glow of youthful

passion as in the opening of *In a Gondola*. But the triumphs of love are sung in poems of wifehood and motherhood." The heroine of *The Inn Album* says :

> "*Womanliness means only motherhood :*
> *All love begins and ends there,—roams enough,*
> *But, having run the circle, rests at home*".

Pompilia, in *The Ring and the Book*, drawn as **Swinburne** says, "with piercing and overpowering tenderness," is the masterpiece in Browning's gallery of woman-characters. In such poems his own love-story and marriage enriched both imagination and emotion.

Abnormal Love and Unconventional Conduct

Browning does not hesitate to represent love which convention frowns upon, he is also a poet of abnormal lovers and their love ; many a love-situation in his poetry is traditionally looked down upon. *Evelyne Hope* embodies the love of a middle-aged man of forty-eight for a mere child of sixteen. The aged lover does not open his lips as long as the child lives, but when she dies, he comes to her bedside, speaks of his love of her, and places a geranium petal in her hand as an emblem of their love, in the hope that she will, "wake, and remember, and understand." In *Porphyria's Lover*, the abnormal lover strangulates the girl with her own silken hair, and then sits calmly with her head on his shoulders. In this way he has made her his own for ever. In *Statue and the Bust*, the lovers fail, and they are reproached for the failure, because they do not run away, even though the woman is married. *Paracelsus* and *Sordello* fail in love because of their own timidity and cowardice. In such poems Browning's attitude seems to be, "*Find your mate and deuce take the rest. Nothing else matters*". *The Glove*, *The Flight of the Duchess*, *My Last Duchess*, etc., are poems of revolt in love, and it is always the woman who revolts and breaks conventions and insults proprieties. True love is bound to be triumphant in the long run, for, "*God creates the love to grant the love.*" Only the lovers must act boldly, like the Duchess, in *The Flight of the Duchess*, who elopes with her gipsy lover and thus attains freedom and true love. In the poem entitled *Confessions*, the dying man, careless of all conventions and religious proprieties, cares for nothing but the memory of his early passion for a girl one happy June.

Conclusion : Faith in Love and Its Triumph

In short, Browning's love-poems deal with the countless phases and varieties of love in all classes of society. They show how Browning, passing through the world, was continually on the watch to catch, to store up, and reproduce a crowd of motives for poetry, which his memory held and his imagination shaped. For Browning love is the central principle of the universe, the highest attribute both of God

and Man, and its triumph and immortality is never, even for a moment, clouded with doubt or uncertainty. To him Love is the conquerer, and Love is God ; true lovers are bound to meet, if not, in this world, certainly in worlds to come. A true lover need not despair, for love is its own reward, and, "God is mighty to create and mighty to grant". He creates love to grant the love In *Love Among the Ruins* he tells us that Empires decay, but love abides, for "Love is best". It is the highest good, the *summum bonum* of human life. Browning's faith in love and the multiplicity and variety of his love-poems entitle him to the rank of the greatest love poet in the English language, after John Donne.

11

Browning as a Lyricist

Or

The Lyric Note in Browning's Poetry

Or

Browning's Dramatic Lyrics

The Lyrical Note in Browning's Poetry : Three Categories of His Lyric Expression

A lyric is essentially subjective. It is an expression of the poet's personal emotions, an outpouring of his soul. It is a short poem characterised by music and melody, spontaneity, poignancy, and the expression of the personal emotions of the poet. It is built round a single mood or a single emotion. But Browning's genius was essentially dramatic ; he expresses in his poetry not his own emotions and moods, but the emotions of an imagined character. Emotion there is, but it is not the personal emotion of the poet, but that of some other imagined character. His poetry is dramatic, but it is also emotional. He had objectivity, he could imagine characters, but he presents them lyrically and poetically. That is why his most characteristic poems, and those which are largest in number, are dramatic lyrics : they present an objective dramatic situation lyrically ; the emotion is ascribed to a character other than the poet himself. As a matter of fact, Browning's lyrical expressions fall easily into three categories : (1) *Pure lyrics* in which he expresses personal emotions (2) *Dramatic lyrics*, impersonal poems possessing lyric quality, and (3) poems in which there are passages of great lyrical beauty and intensity.

Pure Lyrics : Their Emotional Intensity

Browning's 'pure lyrics' though only a few in number, are poems of great charm and intensity. These poems are *One Word More, By the Fireside, Prospice,* and the celebrated address to Elizabeth Browning, "*O Lyric Love*", which opens the volume of poems entitled *The Ring and The Book.* They are all songs of married love and celebrate the conjugal felicity which the poet enjoyed in the company of his wife, Elizabeth. Their love story was characterised by passion and

intensity, and it is this very passionate intensity which characterises these love lyrics. They speak of a love crowned with success and continued much beyond courtship, into long years of married life. They are the outpourings of the poet's soul, they come direct from the heart of the poet and so go directly to the heart of his readers. They have a rare ring of sincerity and intensity, and are faultlessly beautiful. As **T.S. Young** puts it, they have, "*The graceful allusiveness of the Elizabethans, the subtle blending of perfume and memory in the manner of Keats,*" the, "*ideal beauty of Shelley,*" and, "*The easy sweep*" of Byron. The address to Mrs. Browning beginning,

O lyric love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire.

can hardly be equalled by any other love-song in the sweetness of its music, and the sincerity and intensity of its passion. It is only the exaggerated importance which has been attached to his dramatic bent of mind, and to his, 'Psycho-analysis', that has come in the way of a proper appreciation of the lyrical beauty of these poems.

The Dramatic Lyrics : Impersonal and 'Escapist'

Browning did leave behind him, "pure lyrics", exquisite and faultless, but more characteristic of him was the dramatic lyric. As **C. Duffin** puts it, "he is at his best in narrative when the idea of a story struck him with lyric intensity, imposing lyric form on the curt outline of a dramatic scene." Browning's lyrical genius reached its full flowering in the volume entitled *Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842. The poet deals not with personal emotion, but with the emotions of his characters lyrically ; throughout they present dramatic situations lyrically. There is nothing philosophical about them ; they are free from the argumentation and discussion which mars Browning's later poetry. Speaking of this volume, **Chesterton** rightly says, "Its general characteristic is the fearless, and most dexterous, use of grotesque things in order to express sublime emotions." Browning himself called the lyrics of this volume, "mere escapes of my inner power". These lyrics are, "escape lyrics, in the sense that they provide an outlet for his emotional energy, and this is exercised not on his own emotions but on those of others. The poet watches and broods over the angers and passions of men and women, with the detached interest of a born fighter." He deals with human passion in all its intensity and variety, but makes no attempt, as in his later poetry, to rationalise these passions.

Their Music and Melody : Metrical Variety

The expression is characterised by a certain extravagance, grotesqueness and unreason. The lyrics also reveal Browning's skill as a metrist. He has invented a number of new stanza-forms to suit his purposes, and such wide is his variety that he hardly ever repeats himself. Each theme has its own appropriate measure, and even the most difficult is handled with consummate skill. Browning cared

more for the sense than for the sound, but where the two combine, we get music and melody far sweeter than can ever be achieved by those who care for sound alone.

Browning's Originality as a Lyricist : Enlarged the Scope of the Lyric

Browning invented a new lyric-form, the dramatic lyric, and he also increased and widened the scope of the English lyric. In the dramatic lyrics of the volume entitled *Men and Women,* the poet's dramatic impulse operates on a world of scholarship, philosophy and mysticisim in poems like, *Saul, A Grammarian's Funeral, Childe Rolande. Abt Vogler* is an expression of the poet's mystic understanding of the mysteries of music, but his musical gifts are shown to greater advantage in *Toccata.* It is a supreme lyric, profoundly conceived and perfectly executed ; its music lingers long in the memory, and is never completely forgotten. His originality is seen in another way also. A lyric is a short poem, but the most representative pieces in this volume are long, and yet the lyric impulse is sustained from beginning to the end. *Rolande* opens out vast vistas of thought and beauty before the reader's imagination ; it is a lyric vision. *A Grammarian's Funeral*, on the other hand, is lyric thought. The theme is intellectual, but it is treated lyrically. The intense feeling of the poet for the dead scholar transforms thought itself into passicnate intensity. The poet can feel or realise emotionally the intellectual ideals of the dead scholar. It is an instance of what **T.S. Eliot** would call, *"Unification of sensibility"*. It must rank, despite its length, with the very greatest lyrics in the English language.

His Love-Lyrics : Their Immense Variety

Browning was the greatest of English love-poets, after Donne, and the best of his lyrics are love-lyrics. We have already noticed above the few, "pure lyrics", in which he expresses his personal love for his wife. Love-lyrics which are impersonal or dramatic are scattered all over his works, and embody an amazing variety of mood, emotion, and situation. *Porphyria's lover* and *Evelyn Hope* deal with unusual and abnormal love-situations, the Duchess in *The Flight of the Duchess* flouts all conventions and codes of propriety for the sake of her love. In *A Gondola* we have youthful passionate love, *Andrea Del Sarto* speaks of love which leads to degeneration and decay, *The Last Ride Together* deals with failure in love borne courageously, without a word of complaint. Indeed, Browning can treat lyrically the whole gamut of the complex moods and emotions connected with love.

Long, Narrative Poems : The Lyrical Vein

Browning's genius was dramatic, but it was also lyrical. The lyrical impulse penetrates even the poems which are not lyrical in conception and emotion. The lyrical impulse is present in his first

poem *Pauline* ; the narrative in the work is often confused and incoherent. We today read it for certain passages which have almost a lyrical chant, and whose beauty is further insensified by inwoven nature description. *Pippa Passes*, though a drama in form, is largely lyrical in conception and execution. Pippa sings a number of exquisite songs, the most perfect and the most popular of them being the one beginning with,

> *The year is at the spring,*
> *And day is at the morn,*
> ....
> *God is in his heaven,*
> *All is right with the world.*

Conclusion

Browning's lyrical genius reached its culmination in *The Ring and the Book*, in the Apostrophe to Mrs. Browning with which the volume opens. Browning again tried his hand at the pure lyric in the *Asolando* volume, his swan song. However, by this time the poet was over seventy, and the lyric impulse seems to have dried up in the fine love-songs which the volume contains. Age tells even on the greatest of mortals.

12

A General Estimate of Browning As A Poet

Or

The Greatness of Browning As A Poet

Or

The Place of Browning—His Achievement

Or

Browning's Poetic Genius

Browning's Genius : Dramatic and Philosophical

Mrs. Orr in her admirable *Handbook to Browning's Works* points out that Browning's genius was dramatic as well as Metaphysical. He was gifted with an almost unlimited power of imagination which was always exerted upon real things, visible or invisible, that is to say on everything that a human being can think or feel : he is realistic because he is never visionary. He treats of visible realities—the experiences of men and women—and this makes him a dramatic poet ; he also treats of invisible realities, *i.e.* the spiritual and the abstract, and this constitutes him a Metaphysical poet. Just as these two realities, the visible and the invisible, the spiritual, and the physical, are inseparable in human life, so the dramatic and the metaphysical in the genius of Browning are inseparable. His poetry is dramatic and metaphysical at the same time. He is dramatic because he deals with the character and conduct of men and women in a completely living form, but he is also philosophical at the same time, because he also analyses the motives and spiritual consequences of human actions. Spiritual and abstract truths which cannot be illustrated through human conduct and experience, lie outside the range of his philosophy. Such truths are regarded by him as Divine mysteries lying beyond the pale of human thought.

A Philosophical Poet

Mrs. Orr then makes it quite clear that Browning is not a Metaphysical *thinker*, he is a Metaphysical *poet.* He is not a profound

thinker in the sense that he takes much on trust, assumes much to be true, never questions the truth of our basic or innate ideas. As **Chesterton** puts it, it is the greatest slander on Browning to say that his processes of thought are scientific ; they are not. He is a poet and not a philosopher, and to form a correct estimate of his poetry it must be studied as poetry, and not as philosophy. Disregard of this basic truth has resulted in clouding the real greatness of Browning as a poet. There is too much talk of his philosophy, and his poetry is not judged on its merits as poetry.

His Failure as a Dramatist : Its Causes

The most marked feature of Browning's poetry is his profound interest in character. *He is a great master of the art of representing the inner side of human beings, their mental and moral qualities.* Hence the claim is sometimes made for him that he is a great dramatic poet. This is a claim which cannot be substantiated. He cannot interest us in his plot, or represent his *dramatis personae* in action. He catches his characters in a cool moment of introspection or of guarded self-revelation, and he lets us see in their minds the causes and results of previous actions, as few other poets have been able to do. But, directly we behold them actually carrying out their plans, we feel a sense of failure. Their words cease to be appropriate, and become too often conventional and sometimes grotesque. The poet's sense of fitness and even his sense of humour desert him. *Despite his great appetancy for the drama*, says **Herford**, *he could not get success in the drama*. It was through no mere perversity of chance, but through their own proper demerits that Browning's plays failed on the boards. He was lacking in some of the most essential qualifications of the dramatist.

His Characterisation : His Psychological Analysis

Nevertheless, it is yet true, as **Mrs Orr** maintains, that, *"everything which, as a poet, he thinks and feels, comes to him in a dramatic form."* He presents, not only single characters in solitude, but also groups of characters, and he can make each describe how he feels and thinks. Yet he cannot convince us that we see them influencing each other; they do not act and react on each other as they must do in a successful play. In his most successful poems, he presents a character in a condition of pause, and makes clear to us by means of soliloquy or continued address how he got there. No one has ever given us pictures so full of significant detail, with such an intimate and convincing self-revelation. *Cleon*, *Karshish*, *Sludge*, *Franceschini*, *Andrea*, *Blougram*, and, above all, that other Bishop who ordered his tomb, stand out with startling vividness and plausibility. Sometimes it may be thought that the psychologist is a little too prominent ; he lets us see, perhaps, rather too often his interest in the odd and abnormal types, or those which seem such to the superficial observer. He emphasises antithetical attributes in a character a little overmuch. This seems to me the main sin of his *Blougram* and *Hohenstiel-Schwangau*. "But making every allowance, we must acknowledge

that no great English poet since Shakespeare has shown such a varied and subtle insight into human character" (**Ryland**).

His Descriptions

Although he has written little continuous narrative poetry, yet in this department of his art Browning takes a high rank. When he wants to put before us rapid and impetuous movement, he equals Scott at his best. ' There are several passages in *the Ring and the Book* which illustrate this ; and *How They Brought the Good News* alone is sufficient to prove it. His descriptions of scenery and natural objects are extraordinarily vivid, whether included in many stanzas, as in *By the Fire-side*, or struck out in a few words, like the delicious line in *Pippa Passes*.

"*May's warm, .ow, yellow, moonlit summer nights*," they are often beyond all praise. Nothing has ever been done better, scarcely anything else so well.

His Lyric Gifts : His Love Lyrics

His lyrics have a charm of their own which marks them off from all others. To mention only two, no other poet has given us quite the same blending of richness and poignancy as we meet with in *Home Thoughts from Abroad* and *Summum Bonum*. They have, besides, all the essential qualities of good lyrics, unity of feeling, intensity, and individuality. The best of his lyrics are love-lyrics in which he treats of all shades and varieties of love—married love, love triumphant and love unsuccessful, passionate love and abnormal love. Nothing more thoroughly lyrical is to be found anywhere.

His Philosophy

Browning frequently expresses his view on human life. Like Wordsworth or Shelley, he comes to us with a more or less distinct theory of the relation of man to the universe, and exhibits his theory by means of imaginary characters and scenes. In a philosophical poet, we do not expect the rigid consistency or the systematic completeness of the speculative thinker. Bu we have a right to look for a deeper apprehension of the general truths underlying the visible universe, a greater thoroughness and steadiness of view than that of the plain man. He must go beneath the surface of conventional morality and conventional religion, though he need not provide us with a new system, elaborated in all its details. That would require a degree of abstract thinking not possible in poetry, for the poet necessarily expresses himself in terms of the visible. All this is true of Browning. He was not a profound philosopher. But he had more of the air of a profound philosopher than a poet ought to wear. His occasionally uncouth attempts to speak out what he has to say, impress us with the notion that he is striving to utter some truth too deep for ordinary language. He seems to come as one preaching a new revelation, as having a, "message", which he alone can deliver. This view

of him cannot, I think, be defended. His interest in the problems of life and thought is purely practical ; though he has, besides, an artistic interest in human character. He challenges few of the old theological and metaphysical dogmas which have satisfied the spiritual needs of so many centuries. *"He is distinctly conservative in his main positions : he accepts the doctrines of a personal God and of personal immortality, and even perhaps the more specifically Christian doctrine of the Incarnation"* **(Ryland)**.

His Optimism

But the truth of which he is most assured is the worth of life. *He is an optimist to the core.* Like Carlyle, he preaches a doctrine of strenuous endeavour, but with more hope, with completer ideals, and with wider sympathy for all sorts of good. He is not a mere ascetics protesting against art and culture as well as folly. He finds all thing, good, though virtue is the best. Imperfection is due to an inability to see things in their proper relation to each other. Our very weaknesses and follies have their value ; we must learn to tolerate frailties which are an earnest of higher things. In *Abt Vogler*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, and *the Epilogue to Asolando* we have the fullest and the most uncompromising statement of this faith.

Its Value

This firm conviction that life is worth living is Browning's most important characteristic. "He is one of the chosen band who rolled back, as far as England is concerned, the morbid pessimism, the sickly disdain of active life, which has infected so much of European literature during the present century. Tennyson, Carlyle, Dickens, all in their different ways, have taught us the same lesson. With less of appalling dignity than Tennyson, less of scornful denunciation than Carlyle, and less of merely amiable sentiment than Dickens, he has shown us how to look life and death bravely in the face" **(Ryland)**.

Browning is a vital energising force in literature, for which it is difficult to be sufficiently grateful. He inspires readers of all ages and conditions with an impulse of courage and endeavour, not by demonstration or denunciation, but by calling out their sympathy for the weak, the unheroic and the unachieved. He brings us into charity with all aspects of human nature. He is no scoffer, no fanatic ; neither Puritan, nor Materialist, nor Rationalist. He will not, in order to emphasise the spiritual, deny the value of the natural. Of him, with more truth than of any other English poet, it may be said, "*he saw life steadily, and saw it whole.*"

Art and Artists.

His genius had an artistic bent—as is shown by his love of architecture, painting, sculpture, and music,—which leads him to dwell even on the qualities of materials and the details of technical processes. Such poems as *Andrea del Sarto, The Bishop Orders His*

Tomb, *Master Hugues of Saxe Gotha*, are full of instances. "No other English poet could have written them, because no other has anything like the same degree of knowledge and sympathy with art. *Religion, Patriotism and Philosophy are all nobly reflected in our poetry ; but, except in Browning, not Art.*" **(Ryland).**

His Workmanship : Its Roughness

Browning's worst defect, apart from his obscurity, is roughness of workmanship. It is not a necessary defect, since *Pauline* and even *Paracelsus* are tolerably free from it. His later verse sometimes refuses to scan when there is no special reason for roughness. Why should Guido say,

"I am representative of a great line,"

when he is supposed to be talking blank verse ? Some of the lines afflict one as a mere series of jolts and jars. By omission of necessary particles, this unpleasant effect is increased. He often rhymes recklessly, employing awkward double rhymes, for which he invents monstrous compound words. The beautiful *Home Thoughts from the Sea* is marred by the last rhyme. Who can tolerate the first stanza of *A Pretty Woman*, or the tasteless and tuneless tenth.

Faults as a Metrist

Making every allowance for intentional humour, rhymes such as those that startle us in *A Grammarian's Funeral* are an aesthetic blunder. If we consider lines 5-7, 13-15, 70-72, 98-100 in this poem, we see that the effect is in every way disastrous. They are *Hudibrastic* rhymes in a poem of mourning where Hudibrastic rhymes are an impertinence, and they are bad at that. Accents fall on syllables which will bear no accent, and the whole effect is awkward and strained.

His Obscurity

Obscurity in Browning's poetry arises to a certain extent from his pre occupation with soul dissection or psychological analysis, but largely it results from his manner. He practises extreme of compression and condensation, often his style is telegraphic, inverted constructions abound—he writes 'tale first'—and all known rules of grammar and syntax are thrown to the wind. He makes excessive use of parentheses, and broken or half finished sentences. His stupendous learning and fondness for Latin quotations and expressions further complicate matters for his readers. In this respect, Browning is the very, "antithesis of Pope". *He is careful of the thought, but careless of expression.*

His Aesthetic Sense : a Great Metrical Artist

But this is not to say that he had no aesthetic sense, or that he did not care for the beauty of form. He has invented a number of

poetic forms which are of as far reaching a significance as the invention, say, of the sonnet. None has equalled him in the handling of the dramatic monologue. His artistic principle was that a poet should, under no circumstances, sacrifice sense to sound. Hence he often seems to be careless of music and melody. But when sense and sound combine, as they often do in his poetry, he is able to achieve a music more melodious and sweet, than can ever be possible for those, who care for sound alone. He is one of the greatest metrical artists in the English language. He invented a large variety of verse-forms and used them with consummate success. His use of the grotesque is usually artistically justified. There is much in nature which is grotesque, fantastic and absurd, and similarly there is much in thought which is grotesque and fantastic. Such was Browning's genius that he had a predilection for the grotesque and the odd both in the world of nature and in the world of man, as well as in the world of thought, and his grotesqueries of manner are entirely in harmony with the peculiarity of his genius. *As one critic has said, he is the greatest poet of the grotesque in the English language.*

His Real Greatness : His Place

Browning was a highly original genius right from the beginning. Whether in his manner and in his versification, or his choice of subjects and in his treatment of them, he was quite different from the other poets of the day. *He was astonishingly great, but also astonishingly faulty. and his faults have come in the way of the appreciation of his real greatness.* **Hugh Walker** rightly says, "Browning has many poems in which beauty of style is conjoined with profoundity of thought, and in these poems lies the hope of the permanence of his fame. But he drags in his train a dangerous mass of impedimenta. Probably no greater service could be done to his memory than to disencumber him of it, and to make a selection of his best poems such as Arnold made for Wordsworth."

13

The Reputation of Browning

Or

The Modern Note in the Poetry of Browning

Or

The Modern Reaction in Favour of Browning

Or

Browning's Realism

Browning : His Fluctuating Reputation

"Browning's ultimate position in the heirarchy of English poets", says **Hugh Walker,** "is more doubtful than that of any other English poet of the 19th century". This is so because he is astonishingly great and astonishingly faulty. At one time, critics have pounced on his faults and his reputation has suffered, while in another age his many merits and his originality have been recognised, and his name and fame has risen high.

His Popularity : Delayed but Wide

There have been interesting fluctuations in the reputation of Browning. In his own life-time, recognition was slow in coming. As **D. C. Somerwell** writes, "Browning published *Pauline* anonymously in 1833 and *Paracelsus* under his own name in 1835. The merits of these poems were not recognised. Then followed *Sordello,* which was called a terribly obscure poem. The next twenty years saw the publication of most of what eventually made Browning popular with the earnest reading public. His many merits were recognised only as late as the publication of *the Ring and the Book* in 1868. Once his merits were recognised, he was idiolised by an increasing number of readers. Though this popularity came very late, and he had to suffer from general neglect for a long time, Browning retained and steadily extended the circle of his admirers. **Ruskin** in the fourth volume of *Modern Painters,* described him as, 'unerring in every sentence he writes about the Middle Ages, always vital, right, and profound. I know of no other piece of modern English, prose or

poetry, in which there is so much told, as in his poetry, of the Renaissance spirit." **Landor** spoke of him as, 'a great poet, a very great indeed, as the world will have to agree with us, in thinking', and in verse. Praising him, he wrote,

Since Chaucer was alive and hale
No man hath walked along our road with step
So active, so inquiring eye and tongue,
So varied in discourse.

Browning at the Turn of the Century: Causes of His Wide Popularity

His robust humanity, his keen eye for the picturesque and the curious, his metrical and linguistic versatility, his powerful handling of religious emotion, were recognised. Praising *The Ring and the Book*, the *Anthenaeum*, a critical journal, wrote: 'We must record at once our conviction, not merely that *The Ring and the Book* is beyond all parallel the supermost poetical achievement of our time, but that it is the most precious and profound spiritual treasure that England has produced since the days of Shakespeare'. After this Browning suddenly penetrated to the great heart of the people, British and American. In 1831, *the Browning Society* was founded, and in 1886, **Arthur Symons** published his *Introduction to Browning* which gives a vivid account of the causes which made Browning popular with the wide reading public of the 1880's and of the first decade at least of the twentiety century: "In richness of nature, in scope and penetration of mind and vision, in all the potentialities of poetry, he is probably second among English poets to Shakespeare alone. In art, in the power or the patience of working his native ore, he is surpassed by many; but few have ever had so rich a matter... ..If the best poetry is that which reproduces the most of life, his place is among the great poets of the world." Furthur, in the vast extent of his work he has dealt with or touched on nearly every phase and feature of humanity, and his scope is bounded only by the soul's limits, and the last reaches of life. *In one very important matter, that of rhyme, he is the greatest master in our language.* His lyrical poems contain more structural varieties of form than those of any preceding poet. His portraits of women are quite on a level with his portraits of men, and far beyond those of any other English poet of the last three centuries. As a humorist in poetry, Browning takes rank with the greatest. Of all poets, Browning is the healthiest and manliest. The most subtle of minds, his is the least sickly. "The wind that blows in his pages is not hot and langurous breeze, laden with scents and sweets, but a fresh salt wind blowing from the sea." His poetry is a tonic: it braces and invigorates. Browning's Christianity is wider than our creeds, and is all the more vitally Christian in that it never sinks into sentimentalism.

Chesterton and Browning's Reputation

Once Browning had reached the public that was ready for him, his appeal to it was as various as the excellences enumerated by

Symons. But it was probably the religious element in his poetry that counted for most in his popularity. In 1903, **Chesterton** published his book on Browning and it did much to enhance the poet's reputation. For the younger generation, it supplied exactly what was wanted. They had no need any longer to go for interpreters. "*The eminent Victorian poet, dead fourteen years, was sponsored by one of the loveliest, soon to be one of the most famous, of the Edwardians. To those who read Browning because of Browning were added those who read Browning because of Chesterton.*"

Reaction against Browning

After the first decade of the 20th century, there was a turn in the tide and a definite setback in the reputation of Browning. Referring to this change, **Somerwell** has pointed out: "A new generation was growning up, believing itself, not altogether rightly, to be in a new world. It wanted new prophets, and it would only take such of the old prophets as the new prophets chose to introduce to it. Moreover, 'there is a tide', and Browning's prolonged high tide had to be followed by an ebb......Browning was one of the poets they were always talking about at home; how much more exhilarating to take up with poets unknown to the parental library. Moreover, Browning was long, and one had no time for length; he was 'hearty' and 'healthy' and 'manly'—tedious attributes; he was an incorrigible optimist; he slapped you on the back with his, "All's love and all's law', and his,

God's in his heaven,
Dinner's at seven
All's right with the world.

and words to that effect."

Its Causes

Browning's reputation suffered for a variety of reasons. It suffered, first, from a general reaction to Victorianism. As **William Raymond** writes, "In particular, Browning has suffered, along with Tennyson, from the general reaction, inimical to Victorianism and all its works, which has characterised the opening decades of the 20th century." Secondly, his optimism could not be accepted in the 20th century. It was called cheap and blind, by readers used to the novels of Hardy and the poetry of Housman and Davidson. Both Robert Brooke and Sir Walter Raleigh denounced him on this count. Thirdly, the tempo of life has increased in the 20th century and, therefore, the preference to-day is for shorter poems. Much of Browning's poetry is long, sometimes excessively long, and this fact militated against his popularity. It came even in the way of the appreciation of his shorter poems, some of which are among the finest in English. But the last, and the most important reason, for the decline in his popularity, has been the criticism of the neo-classicists, like Irving Babbitt, George Santayana, F.L. Lucas, and T.S. Eliot. They have criticised Browning

for his lack of art, and his excessive emotionalism. They have criticised him for the harshness of his versification, for his grotesqueries of rhyme and metre, and for the many shortcomings of his language and diction. Thus **Irving Babbitt** finds utter lack of classical decorum, balance, and repose in his poetry, and considers him as a representative of decadent romanticism. **F. L. Lucas** falls foul of what he calls, "his stamping and snorting, the garring dissonances of his verse," and considers, "his hastily scribbled poems", as instances of undisciplined romanticism. Their criticism is all negative. They are blind to his many merits, and in their own time they did much to obscure the real greatness of the poet.

The Modern Reaction in Favour of Browning

But in quite recent times, more particularly after the war years, there has been another swing of the pendulum, this time in favour of Browning. In many respects, his poetry reflects contemporary trends, and for this reason he has been hailed as the great fore-runner of the great moderns.

Its Causes : The Modern Note in His Poetry

There are various reasons for the recent reaction in favour of Browning. For one thing, his poetry reflects the contemporary interest in the under-dog, the waifes and strays of society.. He has unbounded sympathy for the poor and the suffering. His poetry is the poetry of the lowly persons, like the poetry of Davidson, Kipling. John Masefield, W. H. Davies, and a host of other poets. His Pippa is a poor, uncultured silk-weaver, David in *Saul* is a poor shepherd boy, and Pompilia in *The Ring and the Book* is a poor, suffering soul. The last mentioned poem has been called the, "epic of common humble humanity". All his great poems, irrespective of their subject, deal with the life and suffering of the poor and the down-trodden. *He sings even of those sinners and outcasts of society, whom even the sinners have cast out.* Not only in his concern for humble humanity, but also in his love and sympathy for the lower animals, does Browning reflect contemporary trends. In his love of the lower animals, Browning has exerted considerable influence on poets like Hardy, Kipling, Masefield, Brooke, etc.

The Urban Note : Use of City Imagery

Again, Browning's poetry is a poetry of the city and city streets, and in this respect also he anticipates such great moderns as T.S. Eliot. In this respect, more than in any other, he is a precursor and a fore-runner. In this, he is far in advance of his age. A born and bred Londoner, he is interested in the great Metropolitan cities of Europe—London, Venice and Rome. While Tennyson was chanting idylls of the countryside, Browning had the originality and the courage to write of the mean and dingy city-streets. The imagery of his poems is drawn from city-streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos,

window-blinds, burnt cork, fashionable fur coats, and the odds and ends scattered in a city restaurant.

His Cosmopolitanism

Further, Browning reflects his contemporary interests not only in his treatment of the city, but also in his cosmopolitanism. Since the war, nationalism has decayed, patriotism is no longer considered enough. Imperialism and the British empire are actually frowned upon, instead of being glorified as in the poetry of Tennyson and Kipling. The sameness of human nature and of his suffering and frustrations in all countries of the world, is recognised and is sung in modern poetry. *In this respect, Browning has close affinities with the modern temper.* He chooses his subjects from all ages and countries, and shows that the human soul is basically the same everywhere.

Browning : His Modern Realism

Further, Browning is a modern in his realism. **Walter Bagehot** calls Browning a thorough realist, "and the least of an idealist of any poet we know". *Realism in art means, "the observation of things as they are, the familiarity with their various aspects, physical and intellectual, and the consequent faculty of reproducing them with approximate fidelity."* Browning is a realist in this thorough sense. He sings of real human beings, in their actual joys and sorrows. He is honest and sincere and truthful in his treatment of humanity. Similarly, he is realistic in his treatment of Nature. All his landscapes are real landscapes, landscapes which he has really seen, and which he reproduces with fidelity in every detail. In the interest of poetic beauty, he does not omit, the mean, the ugly and the grotesque. Further, Browning's realism is seen to greatest advantages in his love poetry. He does not use the ideal imagery of other poets, but the real imagery drawn from the actual surroundings of the lovers. He expresses the true and insatiable realism of the passion of love. Sentiment and passion in his poetry are always realised and made actual. He does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven, but about window-panes, and gloves and garden walls. "He does not deal with abstractions, but awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things acquire a meaning beyond the power of any dictionary to utter, and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to calculate (**Chesterton**). He never forgets the little details which suddenly pierce like an arrow through the heart of a lover. In *A Lover's Quarrel*, the dress of the beloved has been described with the fidelity and accuracy of the catalogue of an auction sale. In his realism, Browning's influence has been like a clear river which has fertilised poets like Hardy, Housman, Masefield, etc.

Browning : a Modern in His Diction and Metrical Experiments

Browning anticipates the modern experiments in verse. He was one of the greatest of metrical artists, and experimented with a wide

variety of stanza-forms and metres. He invented verse-forms to suit the requirement of emotion and passion of his poetry, and in the large bulk of his poetry, he rarely, if ever, repeated himself. He could use blank verse and rhymed verse with equal ease and mastery. Through his own experimentation, he encouraged and stimulated such modern metrists as **G.M. Hopkins** and **T.S. Eliot.** Again, he is a forerunner of the great moderns in his colloquial and conversational style and diction, in his use of commonplace words from the daily life of trade and commerce, and in his fondness for unusual compounds and epithets. **T.S. Eliot** once said that poetry in the modern age must be difficult, and Browning's poetry is certainly difficult and even obscure.

His Psychological Realism : a Fore runner of the Modern Impressionists

In all these respects, Browning in a pre-cursor or fore-runner of the modern poets like T.S. Eliot, W E. Henley and John Davidson. But what makes him a modern in the true sense of the word, a poet much in advance of his age, is his interest in the incidents in the development of a soul. In his, "soul-dissection," in his, "psycho-analysis," in his probings into the heart and soul of men, Browning has his closest affinity with the modern age. His dramatic monologues are so many, "soul-reflectors", in each of them a humon soul reveals itself through self-introspection, through a process of minute self-analysis. The speaker's thoughts range over the past and the future, and both are focused in the present. There is no chronological or sequential development, rather a backward and forward, zig-zag movement. This is another instance of his realism, in this way he faithfully renders the actual thought-processes of his characters. In this respect, he anticipates the techniques of the modern impressionists. Though not a poet of the school of, "stream of consciousness", he foreshadows, 'the inwardness', of contemporary literature. In this respect, he has exercised considerable influence on modern writers, which has been freely acknowledged even by a great writer like Ezra Pound. *Modern poets have benefitted considerably from his psychological realism.*

Conclusion

To conclude : Browning's reputation has fluctuated widely during the last hundred years, and despite his great merits, his place remains uncertain. But there can be no denying the fact that he is a great force in 20th century literature, and a number of poets are heavily indebted to him.

University Questions

1. Comment fully on Browning's obscurity.

2. "After one has listened to the other great poets of the century, Browning's voice sounds strange at first." Discuss.

3. Write a note on the alleged obscurity of Browning's poetry.

4. "The obscurity of Browning's poetry has been much exaggerated." Discuss.

5. Write an essay on, "The poetic Art of Robert Browning."

6. "Browning's poetic art is grotesque." Discuss.

7. Write an essay on Browning as a literary artist.

8. "Browning was a great inventor of new poetic froms, a great metrist, and a great reformer of the English language." Justify.

9. Was Browning's genius truly dramatic ? Give reasons.

10. Comment upon the dramatic qualities of Browning's genius. How would you account for his failure as a dramatist ?

11. "Browning shows remarkable resource and variety in his handling of the dramatic monologue." Illustrate your answer from the poems you have read.

12. Write a note on the handling of the Dramatic Monologue by Browning.

13. "Browning did not invent the Monologue, but he perfected it." Elucidate.

14. "Browning had almost Dickensian sympathy with all sorts of men." Discuss and illustrate.

15. "Give us no more of the body than shows the soul." Discuss how far Browning's own portraits come up to this ideal.

16. "He does not indeed represent action, but of the approaches to action he is a master." Amplify this criticism of Browning.

17. Write a note on Browning's skill in characterisation.

18. Bring out the salient features of Browning as a poet of man.

19. Is the opinion that Browning was, "a mere exponent of the subtleties of human character in verse,' justified ?

20. Write a critical note on Browning's poetic studies in human psychology.

21. Discuss Browning's philosophy with reference to *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *A Grammarian's Funeral.*

22. Write an essay on Browning's optimism.

23. What were the grounds of Browning's optimism ?

24. Discuss Browning's poetry of love with special reference to the poems you have read.

25. Estimate the importance of Browning as a poet of love.

26. Write a brief essay on Browning's love poems.

27. Write a short essay on Browning as a lyric poet.

28. Discuss Browning's contribution to the English lyric.

29. Write a note on, 'Browning's Reputation'.

30. "In his own day, Browning was over-rated as a thinker and under-rated as a poet." Justify.

31. Write a note on, "Browning and the Romantic Tradition."

32. Write an essay on "Browning's romantic realism".

33. Write a note on Browning as the poet of nature.

34. "Browning is, paradoxically, the most original and the most representative poet of the 19th Century." Elaborate this remark.

35. To what extent, if any, is Browning a representative poet.

36. Write a note on Browning's theory of poetry.

37. Give a short account of Browning as a poet, and illustrate your answer from the poems you have read.

38. Examine the merits and demerits of Browning's poetry.

39. "Browning was far in advance of his age." Justify.

40. Write a note on Browning's appeal to modern times.

41. Bring out the modern note in Browning's poetry.

42. Compare and contrast Browning and Tennyson as poets.

43. Account for the delayed popularity and recognition of Browning.

44. Write a note on the language and versification of Browning's poetry.

45. Browning's interest lay in 'soul dissection'. He considered othing else as worth study. Justify.

46. Comment on Psycho-analysis in Browning's poetry.

47. Write a note on the nature and technique of the Monologue and Browning's skill in handling it.

14

My Last Duchess

(*a*) THE POEM

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now : Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her ? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there ; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir 'twas not
Her Husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' check : perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat :" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say ?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed ; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one ! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good ! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling ? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will

Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me ; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping ; and I chuse
Never to stoop. Oh Sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her ; but who passed without
Much the same smile ? This grew ; I gave commands ;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise ? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed ;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, Sir ! Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me !

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Date of Publication : The Setting

My Last Duchess was first published in the volume of poems called, *Dramatic Lyrics*, in 1842. It was republished in the *Dramatic Romances* of 1863. It is a dramatic monologue and **Phelps** regards it as one of the finest dramatic monologues, not only of Browning, but in the whole range of English literature. The speaker is the Duke of Ferrara, an important city of Italy. It was an important cultural centre during the Renaissance. Whether the character of the Duke in the Monologue is based on some actual historical figure or not, there can be no denying the fact that in the Monologue, the poet has captured the very spirit of Renaissance Italy, its intrigues, its sensuality, its greed, as well as its cultural and artistic activity.

As a Dramatic Monologue : The Critical Situation

Browning's monologues grow out of some 'crisis' or 'critical situation' in the life of the principal figure, and embody the reaction of that figure to the particular situation. Placed in such a situation, the chief figure, the speaker of the monologue, indulges in self-analysis and self-introspection, and in this way his soul is laid bare in the poem. In his monologues, generally, the speaker refers to other character or characters, and in this way reveals not only his character but that of others also. The presence of some listener or interlocutor is also implied Thus the present monologue is a remarkable piece of character-study not only of the Duke but also of his last Duchess, and the messenger of the neighbouring Count forms the listener and the interlocutor.

Critical Summary of the Monologue

The Duke of Ferrara, a powerful, proud, and hard-hearted Italian Duke of the n century, has been widowed recently. He

intends to marry a second time. The messenger of a powerful Count, who has his estate in the neighbourhood, comes to the Duke's palace to negotiate with him the marriage of the Count's daughter. The Duke takes him round his picture-gallery and shows to him the portrait of his last Duchess. The portrait is life-like and realistic, and the Duke, who is a great lover of the fine arts, is justly proud of it.

The Duke points out the portrait to the messenger and tells him that he alone uncovers the picture and nobody else is allowed to do so. At this point, the Duke notices an inquiring look in the eyes of the messenger and at once understands that he wants to know the cause of the deep, passionate look in the eyes of the Duchess, and proceeds to satisfy his curiosity. *In this way Browning turns the monologue into a colloquy.* The inquiring looks, particular gestures and movements of the listener, here the messenger, serve as big question marks, and provide the speaker with an occasion for explanation and self-analysis. In this way, much valuable light is thrown on character, and much that is past and dead is brought to life.

In response to the inquiring look of the messenger, the Duke tells him that the deep passion in the eyes of the Duchess does not result from any sex-intrigue or guilty love. He did not give her any occasion to be unfaithful to him. Even the portrait on the wall was done not by an ordinary artist, but by a monk, and he was allowed only one day to do it. He did not allow the Monk any longer time, for he did not want to provide them any occasion for intimacy.. This shows that the Duke is a jealous tyrant and the poor Duchess could not have enjoyed any freedom of movement as the wife of such a man.

Continuing further with his explanation, the Duke tells the envoy that his last Duchess had very childish and foolish nature. She was pleased with trifles, would thank others for even the slightest service they happened to render to her, and had no sense of dignity and decorum. For example, the faint blush of joy on her cheek and neck was not caused by the presence of her husband alone. If the painter happened to mention that her cloak covered her wrist too much, or that paint could never hope to capture the light pink glow on her throat, she would take such chance remarks as compliments and blush with pleasure. She had a childish heart, and was pleased too easily by such trifles as the gift of a branch laden with cherries, the beautiful sunset, or the mule presented to her by someone for her rides round the terrace. She would blush with pleasure at such trifles, just as much as she would blush at some costly ornament presented by him. She was the wife of a Duke who belonged to an ancient family, nine hundred year old. But she considered even this gift of his at par with the trifling services rendered to her by others.

As a matter of fact, she had no discrimination, and no sense of dignity and decorum. She smiled at everybody without any distinction ; she thanked everybody in the same way. He expected better sense from his wife. He did not correct her, for even to notice

such frivolity would have meant loss of dignity, and he did not like to suffer this loss. Besides, she would have argued and discussed with him, instead of listening to his advice. Her habit of smiling continued to grow till it became intolerable to him. At last he gave orders, and, "*Then all smiles stopped together*". The line has been left intentionally enigmatic ; we cannot say for certain how the smiling stopped. But, most probably, the poor, innocent Duchess was murdered at the command of her brutal and stony-hearted husband.

The Duke then asks the messenger to come down, where the other guests of his are waiting. In passing, he tells the messenger that he would expect a rich dowry from his master, the Count, though, of course, he adds very cleverly, his primary concern is the daughter, and not the dowry. The Duke is not only hard-hearted, proud and tyrannical, but also greedy and cunning. He is a hypocrite of the first water. The only good point about him is his love of art. As they go down the stairs, he asks the messenger to have a good look at the bronze statue of Neptune, the sea-god.. In this statue, the god is shown riding and controlling a sea-horse. It was done specially for him by the great sculptor, Claus of Innsbruck. It is the name of an imaginary artist invented to impress the messenger, just as earlier he had invented the name of the painter, Fra Pandolf.

Characterisation

The monologue is an admirable piece of character-study. It is a poem merely of fifty lines but within its brief compass the poet has rendered a vivid and moving description of both the Duke and the Duchess. The tyranny, the pride and self-conceit, the hard-heartedness, and the dictatorial attitude of the Duke have been thrown into sharp relief by contrast with the genial and cheerful good nature of the Duchess. As **Phelps** tells us, she was a frank-hearted, charming girl with a genial disposition and zest for life. But all her expressions of delight, and her frank innocence, uncorrupted by the ways of the world, received only a cold reception at the hands of her husband. The result was she pined away, or was murdered at the orders of the tyrant Duke, her husband. Critics have read into the portrait an autobiographical significance. They have likened her life in the home of her husband to that of Elizabeth Barret, the poet's wife, in the home of her father. Just as Elizabeth suffered from the tyranny of her unsympathetic father, so did the Duchess suffer from the tyranny of her proud and arrogant husband.

Epitome of Renaissance Italy

Not only is the monologue an admirable piece of character-study, but it is also the very epitome of the Italian Renaissance. The very spirit of the age has been captured in this short piece. Its intrigue, its avarice, its cunning and hypocrisy, as well as its love of the fine arts, have all been brought out.

Style and Versification

The style of the Monologue is dense and epigrammatic. The line, "all smiles stopped together," is a concentrated expression of a

whole life's tragedy. But despite this density and concentration, the poem is lucid and clear. It is entirely free from the usual faults of Browning. No doubt, there are a few parantheses, but they do not come in the way of understanding. The poem is written in Heroic couplets, but as the sense runs on from one line to another, the readers are hardly conscious of the rhyme.

(c) EXPLANATIONS AND ANNOTATIONS

That is my last Duchess......look at her

The messenger of a neighbouring Count has come to the Duke of Ferrara. The Duke of Ferrara is a widower, his last Duchess died recently, and he intends to marry the daughter of the Count.

The Duke shows to the messenger the portrait of the last Duchess painted on the wall. The picture has been so well done that it appears life-like and realistic. It looks a living, breathing reality. The Duke is proud of it and considers it a remarkable piece of art. He proudly tells the messenger that the picture is the work of the famous painter, Fra Pandolf. The painter worked on it only for a single day, and yet he could paint such a wonderful picture. He invites the messenger to sit down and look well at the picture. It is only then that he would be able to admire its art.

Ferrara—It was a well known city of Italy. It was one of the most cultured cities of Italy during the Renaissance. It was the estate of the Duke of Ferrara, the speaker of this monologue.

That is my last Duchess......Wall—the words are addressed to the messenger of the Count whose daughter the widowed Duke of Ferrara wants to marry. *My Last Duchess*—the use of the pronoun "my" shows that the Duke regarded his wife as a personal property. *Last Duchess*—the Duchess who has died recently.

Looking as if she were alive—The Duke, despite all his faults as a man and husband, is a great lover of art. He can appreciate the beauty of a work of art. He is proud of the portrait of his last Duchess, because it is a great work of art. It looks life-like and realistic.

Piece—portrait. *A wonder*—a wonderful work of art. *Fra Pandolf*—the name of the painter who painted the portrait. It is the name of an imaginary artist. *Fra*—from, 'Friar', a monk.

Worked busily a day—the painter painted the portrait only in a single day. Why ? Was he in a hurry and could not devote more time, or the jealous Duke did not permit him to stay with his wife for more than a day ?

Will it please you sit and look at her—the Duke invites the messenger to sit down and admire the portrait at ease.

I said 'Fra Pandolf'......to turn and ask thus

The Duke shows the portrait of his last Duchess to the messenger who has come with an offer of marriage on behalf of the daughter of a neighbouring Count. The Duke tells the messenger that

the portrait was done by the great artist Pandolf, who was a monk. He further says that he has told him the name of the painter with a definite end in view. His purpose is to emphasise upon the messenger the fact that he will not like any flirtation with others on the part of his future wife. Even when he wanted the portrait of his last Duchess painted, he engaged a monk, and not an ordinary artist, to paint it. He would expect the daughter of his master, the Count, if she becomes his wife, to concentrate all his attention on himself, and not to indulge in any flirtation with others. Visitors who have looked at the picture carefully have always noticed the deep, passionate look in its eyes, and have then turned towards him inquiringly, as if they wanted to ask him what brought that serious, passionate look in the eyes of the Duchess. But none ever had the courage to put this question to him. The messenger was not the first person to turn to him inquiringly. He would satisfy his curiosity. He himself would explain to him (the messenger) the cause of that deep, serious expression. To understand this explanation it is necessary that he, the messenger, should know the name of the painter.

By design—intentionally ; with a definite purpose.

Read—scrutinised ; examined carefully.

Pictured countenance—the face of the last Duchess in the picture hanging on the wall.

The Depth and......earnest glance—the strong and deep feelings in the eyes of the Duchess.

Since none puts by......but I—the Duke tells the messenger that it is only he who removes the curtain from the picture, and shows it to visitors. None else is permitted to uncover it. The information has no direct bearing on the main theme of the monologue, and so it has been given within brackets.

If they durst—if they had courage enough for the purpose.

How such a glance came there—the visitors wanted to know the cause of that deep, passionate look in the eyes of his wife.

Not the first are you—the messenger is not the first visitor who has turned to him with an inquiring look.

Sir, it was not......that spot of joy

In the portrait, the Duchess is shown to have a faint blush on her cheeks. The Duke explains to the messenger how that slight flush of joy came to her cheeks. It was not caused merely by the pleasure she derived from the presence of her husband. As a matter of fact, she had a childish heart and was easily moved even by little acts of courtesy. For example, she would flush with joy and her cheeks would acquire a reddish glow, if the painter happened to remark that her loose cloak covered her wrists too much (and so they looked more beautiful) or if he happened to remark that he could never hope to reproduce in the portrait that he was painting, the faint reddish glow caused by a light blush on her white neck and throat. She

would take such casual remarks as compliments. She would consider them as appreciations of her beauty, and so would blush with pleasure.

The Duchess, as a matter of fact, had a simple, innocent nature, ready to appreciate even little acts of courtesy, and was easily pleased even by a trifle. But the Duke regards it as rather childish on her part. Rather, in his opinion, she lacked in dignity. He would expect a more dignified and proper behaviour from his second wife.

Spot of joy—a faint blush caused by pleasure.

Mantle—cloak. *Laps*—covers.

Faint half-flush—the light blush or reddish glow on the neck and the throat.

Such stuff—such remarks. *Were courtesy*—they were merely courtesy without any further meaning or implications.

And cause enough ......spot of joy—but the Duchess was so childish that she took such passing remarks seriously and flushed with joy. The blush on her cheeks in the portrait was caused by such meaningless remarks.

She had a heart-how shall I say......on blush at least

The Duke further tells the messenger that the last Duchess had a very simple, childish nature. He fails to find suitable words to describe her childish simplicity. She was pleased by trifles She was so sensitive that even little acts of ordinary courtesy were sufficient to make her blush. She liked everything she looked at, and she look at all things. She could not judge and distinguish between what was really worthwhile and what was not. She had no discrimination, or sense of right and wrong. The ornaments which he presented to her and which she wore on her breast, the beautiful sunset in the western sky, a branch laden with cherries from the garden presented to her by some foolish admirer, the white mule on which she used to ride on the terrace, each one of such trifles would draw thanks and appreciation from her. Even when she did not express her pleasure in such things in words, she would at least blush with pleasure and thus show her appreciation.

The Duke is critical of the dead Duchess. In his view, she lacked good sense and discrimination. His vanity is hurt at the very thought that she treated his own presents at par with petty trifles given to her by others.

It was all one—she could not distinguish between the worth of one thing and another. She had no sense and discrimination.

My favour at her breast—some costly ornament presented to her by the Duke. She wore it on her breast.

The dropping of the daylight— the beauty of the sunset.

Some officious fool—some foolish interfering admirer of hers.

Officious—a person who meddles with the affairs of others.

Terrace—a raised walk or drive in front of an Italian Villa.

The approving speech—a few words of thanks and appreciation.

She thanked man......anybody's gift

The last Duchess was simple, innocent, and frank hearted. She thought there was no harm in thanking those who showed her even a trifling courtesy. She would appreciate even the slightest courtesy shown to her. The Duke did not like this. His pride was hurt. She was married to a Duke (to himself) whose family history could be traced back nine hundred years. He belonged to a noble, and ancient family of Italy. As his Duchess, she ought to have behaved with becoming dignity. But she was not at all conscious of the honour he had bestowed upon her by marrying her. She could not differentiate between the gift of rank and position that he had given her, and the petty trifles that others presented to her. She thanked everybody in the same way.

The Duke is critical of the conduct of his last Duchess and considers it unbecoming and frivolous. In his opinion, she lacked in dignity and intelligence.

Ranked—considered of the same value.

My gift......name—The Duke is very proud of his family, which has a nine hundred years old history. It is an ancient and noble family of Italy, and so he is proud of it.

Who would stoop......I choose never to stoop

The Duke tells the messenger that his last Duchess had the childish habit of thanking everybody. There was no harm in thanking others as such, but she failed to distinguish between the valuable gifts given to her by him, and the ordinary acts of courtesy done by others.

The Duke further says that he did not try to correct her and put an end to her foolishness in thanking everybody, because he thought it below his dignity to take note of her childish conduct. Moreover, he does not have the gift of fine speaking which orators have. He does not have sufficient skill in speaking, and so could not have brought home to his wife, even if he had tried, her folly in thanking everybody without discrimination She was so childish that she would never have understood what displeased him. She would never have realised that in certain matters she failed, and in certain other respects she went beyond limits. Thus, she failed in maintaining the dignity of his noble family, and she exceeded all limits in thanking others. Moreover, she was so childish that she would never have accepted her faults and tolerated such criticism. Rather, she would have indulged in argumentation and discussion. She would have tried to justify herself, and given reasons for her conduct. Even if he had the necessary skill, and even if she were ready to be instructed by him, he would have considered it a loss of dignity on his part to have corrected her. He, therefore, decided not to come down even a little.

The speech clearly reveals that the Duke is a proud and conceited person. He has false notions of dignity and decorum.

Stoop to blame—Nobody would like to suffer a loss of dignity by criticising such foolish conduct.

Trifling—foolish, childish conduct.

Your will—your desires. *To such an one*—to a frivolous, childish person like the Duchess.

Here you miss......the mark—in certain respects she failed in dignity and decorum, while at other times she crossed all limits.

Set her wits to yours forsooth—at once began discussing and arguing with you. *Forsooth*—at once.

Made excuses—tried to justify her conduct.

Oh, Sir, she smiled......smiles stopped together

The Duke tells the messenger that his last Duchess was childish and frivolous. She did not know how to conduct herself with dignity and decorum as the wife of a man of rank and birth like himself.

She had a habit of smiling. She smiled at eveybody. There is, no doubt, that she smiled at him as he passed by. But then she smiled at everybody who passed by her. There was nothing particular in the way in which she smiled for her husband. Now, this was wrong. She did not have discrimination. She did not distinguish between her husband and others, and treat them differently. The husband, more specially one like him, belonging to an ancient and noble family, must not be treated like every Tom, Dick, and Harry.

Her habit of smiling and thanking for the slightest courtesy shown to her increased so much that he could not longer tolerate it. Therefore, he gave orders that her smiling should stop, and so all smiling was stopped. How did the smiles stop ? What were the orders he gave ? The poet has left the meaning obscure. **Hiran Carson** and **Berdoe** suggest the orders were that she should be put to death, and so the poor Duchess was murdered. It should be noted that all this speech is intended to impress the messenger. His future wife must have a sense of decorum and dignity, she must not be too polite, otherwise she would meet the same fate as the last Duchess. He must convey this to his master, the Count.

I gave commands—the very language used by the Duke shows his proud, dictatorial nature.

Than all smiles stopped together—**Robinson** comments on this line as, "a tragedy in five words," the tragedy of a whole life concentrated within a little space.

I repeat the Count your master's......in bronze for me

The Duke now changes the subject and talks about his intended marriage with the daughter of the Count, the master of the messenger. He tells the messenger that he knows the reputation of his master for generosity and liberality. The natural generosity of his master is sufficient guarantee that his legitimate expectations for a dowry would be fully satisfied. A suitable dowry will not be denied to him. Then very cunningly he adds that, of course, his primary interest is not in the dowry but in the fair daughter of the Count. He had told

him so in the very beginning, and now he repeats it so that there may be no misunderstanding.

Now the Duke and the messenger prepare to go down where the company is waiting. The messenger stands back so that the Duke may descend first, but the Duke politely says that they would go down together. However, before they descend the stairs the Duke calls the attention of the messenger to a bronze-statue of Neptune, the sea-god. The statue shows the god riding and controlling a sea-horse. The Duke is proud of the statue and says that it is a rare statue specially carved out of bronze for him by the famous sculptor Claus of Innsbruck. The Duke thus tries to impress the envoy with his artistic tastes.

Munificence—generosity ; liberality.

Ample warrant—sufficient guarantee.

Just pretence—reasonable expectation or claim.

Disallowed—rejected ; denied. *Avowed*—said ; declared.

Neptune—the sea-god in classical mythology.

A rarity—a rare statue, specially carved out for the Duke.

Claus of Innsbruck—an imaginary sculptor.

Bronze—a metal compounded out of copper and brass.

15

The Last Ride Together

(a) THE POEM

I

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
  Since this was written and needs must be—
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
Only a memory of the same,
—And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
  With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
  Who knows but the world may end to-night?

III

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions—sun's
And moon's and evening-stars at once—
  And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,

Till flesh must fade for heaven was here !—
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear !
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry ?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me ? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell !
Where had I been now, if the worst befell ?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V

Fail I alone, in words and deeds ?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,—All labor, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past !
I hoped she would love me ; here we ride.

VI

What hand and brain went ever paired ?
What heart alike conceived and dared ?
What act proved all its thought had been ?
What will but felt the fleshly screen ?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statement's life in each !
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing ! what atones ?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

VII

What does it all mean, poet ? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only ; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.

'Tis something, nay 'tis much : but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men ?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme ?
Sing, riding's a joy ! For me, I ride.

VIII

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn !
You acquiesce, and shall I repine ?
What, man of music, you grown gray
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,
But in music we know how fashions end !"
I gave my youth ; but we ride, in fine.

IX

Who knows what's fit for use ? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being—had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such ? Try and test !
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best ?
Now, Heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X

And yet—she has not spoke so long !
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned,
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide ?
What if we still ride on, we two
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,—
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, forever ride ?

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

Date of Publication

The poem *Last Ride Together* is regarded as one of the finest love-poems of Browning. It is a rather long poem of ten stanzas,

each of eleven lines. It was first published in 1855 in Vol. I of the collection of Browning's poems entitled *Men and Women*. Later, it was included in *Dramatic Romances* published in 1868.

As a Dramatic Monologue : The Critical Situation

Last Ride Together is a dramatic monologue and it shows Browning at his best in the handling of this poetic form. It has also been called a dramatic lyric because it is not an expression of his own personal emotions, but that of an imagined character. It is spoken by a lover who loved his lady over a long period of time, and who, after making him wait for so long, finally rejected him, and turned to another lover. The lover then prayed to her to grant two requests of his. First, that she should remember his love of her, and secondly, that she should come with him for a last ride together. To his great joy the lady consented.

Critical Summary of the Monologue

Such is the love-situation out of which the monologue grows. It is spoken by the lover as he rides by the side of his beloved for the last time. As they commence their ride, the beloved for a moment bends over him and places her head over his shoulders. It seems to him as if heaven itself had descended over him, so great is the bliss he experiences at the moment.

As they ride along, the lover experiences a heavenly bliss. His soul which had lost its happiness and on which grief had left its ugly marks and wrinkles, now smoothens itself out like a crumpled sheet of paper, which opens out and flutters in the wind. All his hopes of success in love, all hopes of a happy life with his beloved, were now dead and gone. His love was now a matter of the past. But the lover does not despair. He shares Browning's optimism and says that it is no use to regret or to feel sorry for a life which has been ruined. What is ended cannot be mended. It is no use speculating over his possible success, if he had acted and spoken differently. It is just possible that had he acted differently, instead of loving him, she might have hated him. Now she is only indifferent to him. Now at least she rides by his side. He derives consolation from this fact, instead of brooding sadly over the dead past.

The lover then reflects over the lot of humanity in general, and derives further consolation from the fact that he is not the only one who has failed in life. Such is the lot of man that all try, but none succeeds. All labour, but all fail untimately to achieve their ends. How little of success and achievement, and how much of failure does the whole world show ! He is lucky in the sense that, at least, he rides by the side of his beloved. Others do not get even that much of success. There is always a wide disparity between conception and execution, between ambition and achievement. Human will is seldom transformed into action ; human limitations always hamper action and the achievement of one's desires. No one gets an adequate

reward for his achievements. The only reward, even of the most successful statesman, is a short obitury notice, and that of a heroic warrior only an epitaph over his grave in the Westminster Abbey. The poet, no doubt, achieves much. He expresses human thoughts and emotions in a sweet, melodious language, but he does not get any of the good things of life. He lives and dies in poverty. The great sculptor and musician, too, are failures. From even the most beautiful piece of sculpture, say a statue of the goddess, Venice, one turns to an ordinary, but a living, breathing, girl; and fashions in music are quick to change. Comparatively, he is more successful, for he has, at least, been rewarded with the company of his beloved. At least, he has the pleasure of riding with her by his side.

It is difficult to say what is good and what is not good for man in this world. Achievement of perfect happiness in this world means that one would have no hopes left for life in the other world. Failure in this world is essential for success and achievement in the life to come. He has failed in this life, but this is a blessing in disguise. It means that he would be successful in the life to come. He can now hope for happiness in the other world. Because he did not get his beloved here, he is sure to enjoy the bliss of her love in the life after death. Now for him, "both Heaven and she are beyond this ride." Failure in this world is best. Further, so hopes the lover, "the instant may become eternity" and they may ride together for ever and ever. Who knows that the world may end that very moment? In that case, they will be together in the other world, and will be together for ever.

Soul-study : Optimism

The monologue lays bare before us the soul of the lover. As he muses over his past failure in love, his bliss in the present, and his hopes for the future, we get a peep into his soul. He is a heroic soul who is not discouraged by his failure in love. He derives consolation from failure itself. He shares the poet's cheerful optimism, his faith in the immortality of the soul, and believes, like him, that, "*God creats the love to grant the love.*" It is better to die, "without a glory garland round one's neck," for there is a life beyond and one should have some hope left for it, "dim-descried".

An Excellent Love poem

As a love-poem, the monologue has been widely praised. **W. H. Phelps** calls it, "*one of the greatest love-poems in all literature.*" As **John T. Nettleship** tells us, it deals with love, "*as an aspiration which was not to be realised here at all, but must have its completion in the other life.*" **Herford** regards its passion as of a rarer and more difficult kind than that of *Evelyn Hope*. It is a poem of unrequited love in which there is nothing but the noblest resignation. There is no despair, no wounded pride, and no anger. The lover says, **Berdoe**, "***has the ideal in his heart; it shall be cherished as the occupant of his heart's throne for ever,—of the ideal, at least, he can never be deprived.***"

The poem illustrates the truth of **Herford's** view that in Browning's poetry the tragedy of love is only for the woman ; while his lovers have his own, "supple optimism, his analytic, dissipating fancy, infused into his portrayal of the grief-pangs of his own sex." The poem conveys a message of cheer and optimism to despairing humanity, as well as, "glows with pure poetic fervour." According to **Raleigh**, while in other poems the poet is entirely pre-occupied with the, "glory of failure," the present poem, "flushes with the human glory of possession," though the possession is brief and fleeting. While all other critics are at one in praising the poem, **S. A. Brooke** is the only one who points out its inherent defect. He. writes, "the lover in the poem thinks more of his own thoughts than of the woman by his side, who must have been somewhat wearied by so silent a companion " *Intellectual analysis and argumentation come in the way of emotional intensity.*

Its Style and Versification

The poem is entirely free from the usual faults of Browning. There is no obscurity. The language is clear, simple and lucid. There is no display of learning, no unusual, and far-fethed comparisons, and no excessive use of parantheses. The poem contains a number of memorable phrases. To quote only two examples : '*The petty done, and the vast undone*,' and, "*the instant made eternity*". The images of the, "Billowy bosomed cloud", and of the poet's soul opening out like a, "cramped scroll", are exquisite. The poem also brings out Browning's skill as a metrist. In the long-drawn rhythm of its verse, the poet has succeeded in capturing the steady stride of the horses as they carry along their respective riders. As we read the poem, we seem to hear the very gallop of the two horses : "*The rhythmic beat of the verses accords well with the thought, mood and movemen of the poem.*"

(c) EXPLANATIONS AND ANNOTATIONS

Stanza 1

A lover was kept waiting by his beloved for a long period of time, and then the lady finally rejected his love and turned to another. The love of the rejected lover was true and sincere, but despite the intensity of his passion, he does not despair or feel embittered. He tells hers frankly that now at least uncertainty is over, and he knows that he cannot get his love, despite all his efforts. The only meaningful thing in his life was his love of her, and now that he has failed in love, his life has lost all its meaning and significance. He does not value it any longer. However, neither does he blame the beloved, nor is he angry with her. He knows that the failure was ordained b God, and what is fated cannot be blotted. Rejection and suffering w in his fate, and so it is useless to despair or to blame any one. T lover, therefore, is resigned to his fate. Rather, he is proud that at east he had the privilege of loving her and enjoying her company for such a long time. He thanks her for the moments of perfect bliss

which he had known in her company. For this, he prays to God to bless her. He has now no hopes of ever getting her love in this life, still in the end, he requests her to grant two wishes of his. He desires first, that he should be permitted to cherish the memory of her love, and the period of supreme happiness during which he courted her. Secondly, he desires, if she considers nothing improper or indecent in his request, that she should come with him for a last ride together.

I said—the poem is a monologue. It is the rejected lover who is the speaker.

Since it is so—since you cannot love me and are obliged to reject me.

At length—at last ; it seems that the lover had courted her a pretty long time.

Since nothing at all my love avails—since all the sincerity and intensity of my passion has failed to win your heart.

All my life seemed meant for—the only ambition of the lover in this life was to get her love. He has failed in this purpose, and so life has no longer any meaning for her.

Pride—the lover considers it a proud privilege to have loved her. *Thankfulness*—he thanks her for the moments of happiness he has known in her company.

Take back the hope you gave—the lady had made him hope that one day she would certainly love him. But now he no longer has such hopes.

I claim a memory of the same—the poet only wishes to cherish the memory of her love (or does he mean that she should, at least, remember how devotedly he loved her).

If you will not blame—if you do not consider it improper.

Stanza 2

The rejected lover requested his lady to come with him for one last ride together. The lady could not decide at once whether to grant the request or reject it. For a moment, her head was bowed down, as if she were in deep thought. Her deep dark eyes expressed both pity and pr .. Her virgin pride and modesty was in conflict with her pity fr the lo.er. Her feelings of pity prompted her to grant the last reque· of her lover, but her maidenly modesty made her regard the request , improper and so to be rejected. She hesitated for a moment or two. These brief moments were a time of great torture for the lover. His fate hung in the balance. It was a matter of life and death for him. If she agreed to the last ride with him, it would mean life for him ; her refusal, on the other hand, would kill him.

At l the lady granted his request. He lived once again

restored. As long as the lady hesitated, the lover felt almost lifeless, as if there was no blood in his body. Now life and activity within him was revived by her favourable reply. His last desire was at lt it fulfilled; the request had not been made in vain. As a result, they now ride together side by side. They will breath and ride, and he will enjoy heavenly bliss, like a god, for one day more. The lover has all Browning's robust optimism, and so hopes that, it is just possible, that the world may end that very night, and so the moment of his bliss may become eternal. In that case, he would always be with her and would enjoy eternal happiness in the life after death. So, there is no need to despair at her rejection of his love.

Bent that brow of hers—looked down, as if in deep thought.

That brow—that beautiful brow or face of hers.

Demurs—lingers; objects; comes in the way of; is in conflict with.

When pity would be softening through—the lady pitied the lover, and wanted to grant his request, but her virgin pride and modesty came in the way.

Fixed me—as the lady hesitated, the lover was in great suspense. He was motionless as if the very circulation of blood in his body had stopped.

For a breathing while—for a moment or so.

With life or death in the balance—his fate remained undecided and he suffered great mental torture, for his life and death depended on the reply of the lady. He refusal was bound to kill her, while her agreeing to his request would mean a new lease of life for him.

Right—the lady granted his request.

Replenished—re-filled; the circulation of his blood was restored; life and animation returned to him. He was pale with fear no longer.

My last thought at least was not vain—at least his request for a last ride had been granted.

Deified—will enjoy the bliss of heaven, like a god. By granting his request, the beloved raised him to the dignity of a god.

The world may end to-night—It is just possible that it may be the Doomsday and the world may come to an end that very night. In that case, his happiness would become eternal. In that case, they would be for ever together in the other world, and thus his pleasure would become permanent.

Stanza 3

In this stanza, the lover tells us of the heavely bliss which he experienced for a short while as the lady bent towards him and placed her head on his shoulders. Her body was in close contact with his own, and the lover experienced heavenly bliss during the short moments that she lay on his breast. In order to convey his etstasy, the lover uses a highly imaginative but exquisite image.

Suppose a man sees an evening cloud, round and swelling like a billow (a sea-wave), the cloud is illuminated and made beautiful by the light of the setting sun, the moon and the stars. The man who looks at the cloud at such a time, feels so strong a passion for it, such an ecstatic joy in its beauty, that the very intensity of the passion, so it seems to him, draws down the cloud and it comes closer and closer to him. In such a moment, the man will feel that his physical self has melted away, and he has got free of the limitations of flesh. He will feel a spiritual delight, as if he had been transported to heaven itself. It was such a heavenly bliss which the lover felt as the beloved leaned against him. It was the intensity of his passion that had drawn her towards him, and his bliss was heavenly. But his joy was mingled with fear. His bliss, no doubt, was heavenly, but he was afraid that any moment the beloved would withdraw, and his happiness would come to an end.

Hush—be silent. The poem has a dramatic beginning. The lover asks the person, who is the listener to the monologue, to listen to him quiety and not to interrupt him. Perhaps, the listener wanted to ask some question.

Western cloud—a cloud in the western sky, at the time of sunset. *Billowy-bosomed*—round and swelling like a billow or sea-wave. *Over-bowed*—heavily burdened with ; enjoying in abundance.

Many benedictions—many blessings, here the reference is to the sunlight, the moonlight and starlight falling on the cloud. These are the blessings with which the cloud is bowed down.

Loving best—looking at the cloud, and loving it more than anything else.

Conscious grew—felt ; experienced.

Your passion drew—the intensity of your love drew it down towards you.

Till flesh......was here—till you felt that heaven itself had descended upon you. So you experienced heavenly bliss, and felt as if your body was dissolved and your soul was freed from bodily limitations.

And lingered......joy and fear—as the lady bent over the lover, he experienced heavenly ecstasy. But his heavenly joy was mixed with fear. He was afraid that the lady would withdraw her body, the very next moment.

Stanza 4

The lover commenced his last ride in the company of his beloved. The company of the beloved had the same effect on his soul, as the wind has on a document or sheet of paper which is crumpled, as it has been kept rolled up for a long time. A document gets crumpled and wrinkled, if it is kept rolled over a long period of time. But when exposed to the wind, it opens out, its wrinkles are all smoothed cut, and it flutters in the wind, like a bird, In the some way, his soul.

too, had grown wrinkled and disfigured with grief. He felt suffocated and cramped owing to his failure in love. But now in the company of his beloved, his soul expanded and fluttered with joy. He felt refreshed and animated once again. His soul was released from the crushing pressure of grief and suspense.

The lover says that his hopes of getting her love are now a matter of the past. But grieving over a life which has been a failure is in vain. Regret for the past is of no good at all. It is no use musing that perhaps he might have got her love, had he acted in a different manner, or expressed his love in different words. It is just possible that instead of loving him, she would have hated him in that case. At least now she does not hate him, but is just indifferent to his love. Now at least he has the pleasure of this last ride with her. Had he acted differently, it is possible that he might have lost even this pleasure.

Smoothed itself out—opened out and expanded with joy. The cramping burden of grief was removed.

A long-cramped scroll—a sheet of paper which has been kept rolled up for a long time, and so has become disfigured and crumpled. *Scroll*—a rolled up document.

Freshening and fluttering—opening out and fluttering in the wind, as if with joy.

What need to strive with a life awry—it is no use to worry for what is past and dead. The lover does not regret or speculate over his past failure in love. *To strive*—to worry ; to regret. *A life awry*—a life that has been a failure.

Had I said that—had he expressed his love differently. *Had I done this*—had he acted differently.

So might I gain, so might I miss—it is just possible that by acting differently he might have gained her love, but it is also possible that even then he might have lost it. One can never be sure in such matters.

Where had I been, if the worst befell—her hatred would have been the greatest misfortune ; it would have made him totally wretched and miserable. *The worst*—the hatred of the lady. *Befell*—happened.

Stanza 5

The lover, as he rode by the side of his beloved, mused on the sorry lot of humanity in this world. He was not the only person to fail in his life, in his words and actions. All men make efforts, but none succeeds. As he rode by the side of his beloved, he felt as if his spirit was soaring high. The entire landscape seemed to him to wear a different look. The fields through which they passed and the cities they come across, seemed to him to be bathed in divine glory. His own joy transfigured and illuminated the entire region which

rushed passed them, on both sides, in an opposite direction, as they rode forward.

As the lover reflected on human life, he realised that all in this world work hard to achieve their objectives, but all have to suffer failure. All effort or struggle is in vain ; man can never achieve his ambitions. Despite life-long work, man can achieve very little. Actual achievement is small in comparison with much that remains undone. In the past, all hoped for success and achievement, but it is very little that they have succeeded in achieving. Aspirations of man are never realised ; he ever fails to reach his ideals. In the same way, he also hoped to get her love. This was his ideal. Like others, he, too, has failed to reach his ideal. But he, at least, has the consolation of riding with her. Others are denied even this much of consolation.

Strive—make efforts ; struggle to get success. *Who succeeds*—but none succeeds in this world. Such is the fate of man.

It seemed my spirit flew—the exultation of the lover was such that it seemed to him as if his soul was soaring high to heaven.

Saw other cities, regions new—the entire landscape was transfigured and illuminated by his own joy. It looked more beautiful ; it seemed to be bathed in a light that never was on sea or land.

Here we ride—the lover derives consolation from the fact that he, at least, has been successful enough to enjoy a ride in the company of his beloved.

Stanza 6

The lover, as he rides with his beloved, continues to muse over human lot in this world. Conception and execution never go together. Achievement has always fallen short of the ideal ; there never has been any equality between the two. No man is able to carry out his plans ; action does not keep pace with man's ideals and ambitions. Man plans much but achieves little. Man's determination, his will to achieve, is hampered and obstructed by his physical limitations. He has at least achieved this much of success that he rides in his company and has the satisfaction of seeing the rise and fall of her bosom. His lot is better than that of many others, for effort is rarely rewarded. Take the case of a statesman. He works hard all his life, but all his skill and labour is rewarded merely with a few lines published as obituary notice in the newspapers. This is the only recognition he gets. Similarly, a great soldier and worrior lays down his life fighting for his country. But his only reward is that he is buried in the Westminster Abbey, where only the great and the heroic personages are buried, and a flag is hoisted over his memorial. Sometime, an epitaph may be raised in his memory. But that is all. His reward is much better. It is more concrete and solid.

Hand—action ; achievement. *Brain*—conception ; ideas and ideals. *Went ever paired*—the achievement falls far short of the ideal.

Conceived—thought ; formed plans. *Dared*—had the courage to act upon his plans.

What act proved.. ...had been—ideals and aspirations of men are never achieved in practice.

Will—determination. *Fleshly screen*—the limitations of the body ; physical limitations.

Heave—rising and falling.

There is many......reach—there is always some reward for one who works and strives, but this reward falls far short of his expectations.

Ten lines......each—what is the reward of a statesman who has devoted his life to his country. When he dies there is a brief obituary notice (the account of the life of the dead) in the newspapers. This is his only reward.

The flag stuck on a heap of bones—the flag planted on the grave or the memorial of a soldier after his death.

What atones ?—the compensation a soldier gets for his heroic deeds is of no significance at all.

Scratch—engrave ; carve. *Abbey stones*—his grave in the Westminster Abbey, a place reserved for the burial of the great, the noble and the heroic. This is their only reward.

Stanza 7

The lover illustrates his point by referring to the fate of a poet. A poet, no doubt, is more skilful than other artists. But his reward, too, is meagre ; his life is also a failure. The poet expresses in sweet, rhythmical language of poetry, the thoughts and emotions which others have, but which they are not able to express in words. In his poetry, he expresses the view that sublime ideals, and beautiful things are best, and men should try to achieve them. He expresses noble ideas in rhymed couplets, but in his own life he fails to achieve them. In his poetry he succeeds even in capturing the very rhythm of human movements. Sometimes, his verse moves in couplets like the gentle gallop of two horses galloping together. All this is a great achievement. But what reward does he get for it. He never gets what is considered best for men. He dies in poverty, poor, sick and old, even in the prime of life. He never achieves his own sublime ideal in life. He is no nearer to those ideals, than those who are no poets, and who never sing of such ideals. Compared to the poet, the lover is more lucky. He has failed in love, but at least he has the consolation of riding in the company of his beloved. The poet does not enjoy even this much of happiness ; he merely sings of it.

Beat into rhythms—express in the melodious and rhythmical language of poetry. *You tell, what we felt only*—the poet expresses thoughts and emotions which others, too, experience but are unable to express.

Pace—put ; express.

It is something......much—it is certainly a great achievement.

Have you...... for men ?—does he succeed in achieving the ideals which he considers best for men ? Does he achieve his own ideals ? He does not. He does not even get the physical necessities of life.

Ere your time—prematurely ; in the prime of life.

One whit—even a little. *Sublime*—lofty ideals. *Turned a rhyme*—composed even a line of poetry.

Sing, riding is a joy—a poet can only sing that riding with one's beloved is a source of great pleasure, but he does never actually enjoy this pleasure. The lover considers himself more lucky in this respect. He is actually enjoying a ride with his beloved.

Stanza 8

Nor is the success of a sculptor any greater. He devotes long years of his life to his art, and shapes a beautiful statue of Venus, the Greek goddess of youth and beauty. Through his art, he expresses his noble ideals of beauty and physical grace. But what is the reward he gets for all his skill, labour and devotion. The people admire his statue, but they turn away from it as soon as they see a real girl. She may have only commonplace beauty, she may be poor and so dressed shabbily, and she may be busy in the prosaic activity of wading through a shallow stream of water. But even then the spectators turn away from the statue to look at her. This shows that life is always greater than art. If this is the truth, and the sculptor must agree that it is so —then, he is more successful, as he has the pleasure of riding in the company of his beloved. The sculptor does not have this happiness. Therefore, there is no reason for him to feel unhappy and dissatisfied.

The musician also is as unsuccessful, as the sculptor. He devotes all his life to his art. He grows old in composing sweet tunes. But the only praise that he gets even from his friends is that, no doubt, he composed music of a high order, and the operas in which his strains were used proved very popular. But then fashions and tastes in music change, and tunes which were once popular hits are soon forgotten. The lover considers himself as happier and more successful than the musician. He, too, devoted his youth, the best part of his life, to courting his beloved. No doubt, he has been rejected, but he has his reward. He has the pleasure of enjoying the last ride in her company. The musician does never enjoy this happiness, this supreme felicity.

Your Venus—the statue of Venus shaped by the sculptor.

Fords—wades through. *Burn*—a shallow stream of water.

You aquiesce—you, the great sculptor, must agree with me The lover addresses the imaginary sculptor, and says that he must agree with him that life is always greater than art.

Repine—repent ; despair. *And shall I repine*—there is no need for him to despair or feel sad. He is more successful than the sculptor.

Man of music—musician.

With notes—the musician devotes his life to the composing of musical tunes. He does nothing else, and grows white-haired in the pursuit of his art.

Greatly his......intend—his opera-music was always noble and sublime. *Opera*—a musical entertainment.

I gave my youth—the lover devoted his youth to courting his beloved.

But we ride—but he is more successful than the musician, for he has got his reward. He has the pleasure of riding in the company of his beloved. *In fine*—in short.

Stanza 9

Having established (proved) the point that in this world none succeeds, despite his best efforts, the lover says that it is not easy to determine what is good for man. It cannot definitely be stated that success in this life is good for man. The lover is the mouthpice of Browning, and he expresses the view of the poet that success in this life means failure in the life to come. Had he been destined to get the love of his beloved and enjoy supreme bliss in this life, he would have nothing left to hope for in the life to come. Human life does not end in this world ; man has a life to live in the other world also. Therefore, when he dies here he should have some of his desires left unfulfilled, so that he may hope for its fulfilment in the life after death. The bliss of the next life may be perceived only dimly, but it is the hope of this bliss which encourages a man and enables him to face death boldly. Therefore, the fulfilment of all one's aspirations in this world is not desirable.

Had he reached his goal in this world and had gained the garland of victory by winning the love of his beloved, he would have had nothing to look forward in the life to come. If he had achieved the supreme happiness in this world, if he had obtained the love of his beloved here, no hopes of any reward in the other world would have been left for him. He has failed in his love in this world, but this means success in the other one. Now, when he dies, he will die with the hope of meeting his beloved in the life after death. Others may search for supreme bliss in this world, but the very idea is sufficient to terrify the lover. He can never dare to make such a quest. Others may try their fate here, but the lover shudders at the very thought of such a trial. If a man gets consumate happiness on this earth, heaven will have no charms for him. To enjoy heavenly bliss, failures and disappointments in this life are necessary. He has failed in his love in this life, but this failure is a blessing, for he now hopes to get her love in heaven. He now looks forward to life after death

with eagerness, because he knows that there he would get the love of his beloved.

Had Fate proposed......my being—If Fate had willed that he should enjoy supreme bliss in this world. *Sublimate*—reach its perfection ; achieve consummation or perfection.

Had I signed the bond—Had he entered into an agreement with fate that he would enjoy perfect happiness here, and like Dr. Faustus, barter away heaven for it.

Have a bliss to die with—One must die with some of his aspirations unfulfilled, so that he may look forward to the fulfilment of his desires in heaven. *Dim-descried*—seen only dimly.

This foot once planted on the goal—having once reached his goal in this life.

The glory-garland round my soul—having won success, and so with joy enveloping the soul, like a garland round the neck of a victor.

Could I descry such—had he achieved success in his love on this earth, he would have had nothing left to look forward to in heaven. Success on earth is not an unmixed blessing.

Try and test—the speaker asks the readers to put his views to test. Let his views be tested by actual experience.

I sink back......quest—the lover has not courage enough to make such a trial. The very thought of perfect happiness in this life strikes terror into his heart.

Stanza 10

During all this time, the lover has been lost in his own thoughts, and his beloved has not uttered even a single word. But this does not matter as far as he is concerned. The very fact that he is riding in her company is a source of heavenly bliss for him. In his opinion, heavenly bliss is nothing but the achievement of one's aspirations. For example, at the time he is enjoying heavenly bliss, for, strong and healthy, he is riding with his beloved who is his heaven. Heaven is, perhaps, nothing but life at its best. Man has always looked upwards and imagined that heaven lies somewhere in the sky. This heaven for man represents the best that he can imagine. The lady is his heaven, for it is in her company that he enjoys the same happiness which others hope to enjoy in heaven.

It would be a heaven on earth for the lover, if they could continue to ride together for ever. He would enjoy heavenly bliss, if the present moment became everlasting, always the same, always unchanging. If there were any change, it should be merely in the intensity and fullness of their emotional experience. Otherwise, the same old life should continue ; it should be old, but also new in as far as their emotional experiences were concerned. He wishes that the moment should become eternal and everlasting, so that they may continue to ride together for ever and ever. That for him would be heavenly bliss, indeed.

At life's best—heaven is nothing but life at its best. *Fair and strong*—enjoying the best of health.

With our eyes upturned—looking up towards the sky.

Whither life is......discerned—man has always imagined that heaven is situated somewhere above in the sky ; which he has always imagined to be the abode of the gods. *Life's flower*—the best that life has to offer or the best which man can hope for.

With life for ever old yet new—with their old life continuing unchanged, except in the intensity of their emotional experiences. *Degree*—the intensity and depth of their emotional experiences.

The instant made eternity—the lover wishes that the moment of his riding with his beloved may become everlasting.

And heaven just......for ever ride—heaven is nothing but the realisation of our highest hopes and aspirations. Therefore, it would be a heaven on earth for the lover, if the moment becomes eternal and so he enjoys the company of his beloved for ever.

16

The Grammarian's Funeral

(*a*) THE POEM

(Time—Shortly after the revival of learning in Europe)

**Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes,
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
Cared for till cock-crow :
Look out if yonder be not day again
Rimming the rock-row !
That's the appropriate country ; there, man's thought,
Rarer, intenser,
Self-gatherd for an outbreak, as it ought,
Chafes in the censer !
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crops ;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture !
All the peaks sour, but one the rest excels ;
Clouds overcome it ;
No ! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit !
Thither our path lies ; wind we up the heights :
Wait ye the warning ?
Our low life was the level's and the night's ;
He's for the morning.
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
'Ware the beholders !
This is our master, famous, calm, and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.**
Sleep, crop and herd ! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
Safe, from the weather !
He, whom we convoy to his grove aloft,
Singing together,
He was a man born with thy face and throat,

Lyric Apollo !
Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note
Winter would follow ?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone !
Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon !
My dance is finished ?"
No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
Make for the city !)
He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
Over men's pity ;
Left play for work, and grappled with the world
Bent on escaping :
"What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled ?
Show me their shaping,
Theirs, who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
Give !"—So, he gowned him,
Straight got by heart that book to its last page :
Learned, we found him.
Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain :
"Time to taste life," another would have said,
"Up with the curtain !"
This man said rather, "Actual life comes next ?
"Patience a moment !
"Grant, I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
"Still there's the comment.
"Let me know all ! Prate not of most or least,
"Painful or easy !
"Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
Ay, nor feel queasy."
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,
When he had gathered all books had to give !
Sooner, he spurned it.
Image the whole, then execute the parts—
Fancy the fabric
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick !

(Here's the town-gate reached : there's the market-place
Gaping before us.)
Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus !)
That before living he'd learn how to live—
No end to learning:
Earn the means first—God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.
Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes !

Live now or never !"
He said, "What's time ? Leave Now for dogs and apes !
Man has Forever."
Back to his book then : deeper drooped his head :
Calculus racked him :
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead :
Tussis attacked him.
"Now, master, take a little rest !"—not he !
(Caution redoubled,
Step two abreast; the way winds narrowly !)
Not a whit troubled
Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon
He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.
Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain !
Was it not great ? did not he throw on God,
(He loves the burthen)—
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen ?
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant ?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment.
He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure :
"Wilt thou trust death or not ?" He answered "Yes !
Hence with life's pale lure !"
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it :
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit :
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him !
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar ;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife ,
While he could stammer
He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be !—
Properly based *Oun*—
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,

Dead from the waist down.
Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place :
Hail to your purlieus,
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews !
Here's the top-peak ; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there :
This man decided not to Live but Know—
Bury this man there ?
Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go ! Let jov break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send !
Lofty designs must close in like effects :
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Date of Publication : The Renaissance Spirit

The Grammarian's Funeral is among the better known poems of Browning It was first published in the volume of poems called ***Men and Women***, 1855. Later on, the poem was included in *Dramatic Romances*, 1868. Though the name of no particular scholar has been mentioned in the poem, critics are of the view that Browning had in mind the life and achievement of *Jacobus Miliclius*, a German scholar of the 15th century. However, it is preferable to regard the Grammarian in the poem as a symbolic figure, as typical of those Renaissance scholars, who devoted their lives to study and research and fell, "martyrs to learning." The time is the early 15th century when the Renaissance was in full flowering and a number of scholars devoted themselves to classical studies and thus brought up a revival of ancient learning. They melted like a candle in pursuit of knowledge. Shunning all the pleasures of the world, denying themselves all the good things and comforts of life, they lived an austere life of exclusive devotion even to little known branches of learning. The dead scholar in the poem is a typical product of his age and environment, and through an account of his life and achievement, the poet has captured the very spirit of the Renaissance. The poem is an epitome of its age, as well as an epitome of Browning's philosophy It has been called a, "*psalm of life, the mighty optimistic song of a life lived in the life of eternity, rather than within the limits of time.*"

As a Dramatic Monologue : Its Symbolic Significance

It is rather a long poem in 145 lines cast in the mould of a dramatic monologue, the favourite poetic form of Browning. It is a mourning song, a funeral chant or dirge sung by one of the disciples of the dead grammarian, as they carry his body up a tall mountain to

bury him there. As the funeral procession moves up, the speaker or the singer sings of the self-abnagation and passion for learning of their dead master, and contrasts him with the common, ignorant people who live in the plain below. Thus the mountain peak, the place of light, becomes symbolic of learning. while the dark plain below symbolise the darkness of ignorance. The difficulties they experience in climbing the mountain symbolise the difficulties which beset the path of learning. *At every step, the poem admits of allegorical interpretation.*

The Situation

Thus the monologue grows out of a critical situation. Their dear, honoured master is dead and so, quite naturally, his disciples review his life and achievement. Quite naturally. they are reminded of his devotion to his books, and the way in which he martyred himself for the sake of knowledge. One of them speaks for the whole group of mourners.

The Substance : The Life and Achievements of the Grammarian

As they carry the body, the speaker tells his story, and dilates on the achievements of the departed scholar. They cannot fitly bury their master in the plain with the ignorant, common herd. Nor will a lower peak suffice ; he shall rest on a peak whose soaring excels the rest. This high seeking man will be buried on the peak which is first visited by the morning light, and as they bear him up the rocky heights, they step together to a tune with heads erect, proud of their noble burden. He was endowed with graces of face and form ; he was a, "lyric Apollo", but his youth had been given to learning, till he had become cramped and withered. This man would eat up the feast of learning even to its crumbs. He would live a noble life when he had learned all that books had to teach ; meanwhile, he despised what other men termed life. Before living, he would learn how to live. He did not care for those who told him that life is short and time passes swiftly. He told them that the human soul is immortal :

Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever.

Deeper he bent over his books, racked by the stone (*calculus*) ; bronchitis (*tussis*) attacked him : but still he refused to rest. He had a sacred thirst. He magnified the mind, and let the body decay uncared for. That he long lived nameless, that he even failed, was nothing to him. He wanted no payment by instalment ; he could afford to wait, and thus even at the moment of the death, struggle, he "ground at grammar." And so, where the,

"Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go!

this lofty man was fittingly, left, "loftily lying."

Epitome of Browning's Philosophy

The monologue is an epitome of Browning's philosophy. It brings out his faith in God, his faith in the immortality of the human soul, his belief that failure in this life means success in the life to come. 'Earth's failure', means, "Heaven's successs', and man's efforts are sure to be rewarded, if not here, then in the life to come. According to **T.S. Young**, "In this poem a life's accomplishment is measured by two different standards; accordingly, as we take into account or ignore the life hereafter." The Grammarian, never doubting that, "Man has Forever," has been content to forgo everything else in the painful pursuit of the minutiae of Greek syntax. Born with the grace of Apollo, he has become shrunken, leaden-eyed, subject to torturning disease and premature death. If a man's life, like that of, "dogs and apes," has no endurance beyond death, then it is clear that this has been a paltry and grotesque existence. If on the other hand, the lofty belief, which he has inspired in these disciples, is warranted, then this funeral procession becomes a pageant of victory. "The cortege winding its way in the dawn, steadily up the mountain-side, until it achieves the summit, with its unlimited panorama, becomes a symbol of life spent in unrelaxing effort until it attains that infinite expansion of the designs and talents of men, which the scholar anticipates with such sublime faith. Are we then to suppose that Browning singles out for special commendation a life devoted with almost ludicrous heroism to the scientific details of philology? No, No more than we are to assume his approval of the crime contemplated in *The Statue and the Bust*. Not the quality of the ambition, but the energy and sincerity displayed in its pursuit is here, as there, the object of judgment."

The Element of Satire

However, there are others who hold a different view and regard the monologue as a satire on those scholars who waste their life in scholarly hair-splitting, and miss the pleasures of life in their excessive enthusiasm for some minute branch of human knowledge. For example, *Richard D. Altick* points out that the repeated contrast in the poem, between, 'know', 'learn', and "book", on the one hand, and '*life*' and '*live*', on the other, stresses its ironical and satirical implications. Further, the grammarian read not only the books, but also the commentaries upon books. He was increasingly cut off from real, actual experience, and only knew more and more about less and less. In this connection, the view of **Chesterton** is convincing and decisive. He tells us that Browning's monologues are never satirical, rather they are defences or extended apologies for their respective subjects. So catholic were Browning's sympathies and so penetrating was his psychological insight that, in one monologue after another, he gives us the point of view of the central figure, analyses his motives and thought-processes, and so makes us see a particular situation from his point of view. In this way, he defends the conduct, not only of the worst sinners, but even of those sinners whom even the sinners have

cast out. Thus in *Andrea Del Sarto* the ill-treatment of his parents by the painter is defended, and in another poem, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, we get an extended apology for the Bishop. He even defends such a mean character as Sludge. Hence, it will not be correct to read a satiric significance in the present monologue. As a matter of fact, the dead grammarian is a typical Browning hero, who with faith in God, and in the life after death, follows the promptings of his own conscience, and does never falter in the way he has chosen for himself. His head may be bloody, but it remains unbowed, he dies, but does not give up his cherished pursuit of learning. The grammarian is not ridiculed, rather, as **T. S. Young** tells us, his energy and sincerity are held up for our admiration.

The Style : Nature-painting

On the whole, the style of the poem is lucid and clear, though at a few places the poet's use of parenthesis and his display of his learning create some difficulty for the readers. Here and there, there is the omission of a word or the use of inverted construction. However, such difficulties are easily overcome and then the many merits of the poem are easily recognised. The narration is dramatic and picturesque. Specially, at the close of the poem, nature on the peak of the mountain has been vividly and beautifully painted through a few, deft touches :

> *Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot ; clouds form,*
> *Lightnings are loosened,*
> *Stars come and go : Let Joy break with the storm,*
> *Peace let the dew send.*

Few strokes and yet a vivid picture. What a rare achievement.

Versification

The poem has been written in a smooth, flowing *Iambic* measure varied here and there by a *Trochee*, and broken by alternating *dactyl*. Frequent use has been made of alliteration. The monologue has been much criticised for its irregular rhythm and strange rhymes. Certainly, there are a number of grotesque or *Hudibrian* rhymes as, "*Cock-crow*", and, "*rock-row*", and '*Fabric*', and, "*Dabric*". However, even this roughness of versification has its use. It suggests the grammarian's rugged journey through life, as well as the rugged track of the hill up which the disciples climb At places, the movement of the verse echoes the very movement of the mourners. Thus in the following lines the slow movement of the verse is suggestive of the dignity and sublimity of intellectual achievement :

> *That's the appropriate country ; there man's thought*
> *Rarer, intenser,*
> *Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,*
> *Chafes in the censer.*

In short, both in its manner and matter, *The Grammarian's Funeral* is a great poem.

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Lines 1—16. Let us begin......crowded with culture.

The Grammarian, a great scholar, one who melted like a candle in the pursuit of knowledge, is dead, and his disciples are carrying his body up a tall mountain on the peak of which he is to be buried. One of the disciples sings the mourning song in which he gives an account of the dead Grammarian's life and achievement.

He says that they will carry his corpse up the mountain, and as the funeral procession proceeds, they would sing together a funeral song. They will leave behind the common fields and villages where the people live tied to their respective duties, like animals to the stake. They sleep safely in their villages situated on the plain, secure from all worry and care till the morning, when the cock-crows and awakens them. While it is still dark on the plains, the light of the rising sun strikes the edges of the mountain peak. The mountain peak, which is the first to receive the light of the rising sun, is the fittest place for the burial of the dead grammarian. It is the home of light, symblic of learning, while the plain below is the home of darkness, symblic of ignorance. It is is a fit place for the burial of the scholar, because on the mountains men's thoughts are loftier, more intense and concentrated, and rise up toward noble ideals and achievements, like incense from a censer in a temple. Therefore, they leave the plains and the ignorant people, and their herds of cattle and their crops. They will go up and bury their dead master on the peak of that tall mountain, the sides of which are covered with cities right upto the top, cities which are the abode of learning and culture, as the plains below are those of ignorance.

Crofts—fields. *Thorpes*—villages. They are vulgar as ignorant rustics live there. *Tether*—stake ; tied to its place of work, like an animal to its stake.

Cared-for—secure from worry, care, etc. *Till cock-crow*—till day-dawn. *Yonder*—on the mountain top where the dead scholar is to be buried. *Rimming the rock-row*—forming a rim of light round the edges of the mountain peak. The 'light' symbolises learning, while 'darkness' symbolises ignorance.

Rarer, intenser—nobler and more intense. *Self-gathered*—concentrated. *For an outbreak*—for expression. *Chafes in the censer*—Just as incense comes out of a censer in a temple. *Chafes*—frets ; is eager to come out ; the word signifies impatience.

The unlettered plain, its herd and crop—the plains with their ignorance and their herds and crops. 'Unlettered' refers to the people who live in the plains. *Sepulture*—burial. *Citied*—having cities. *Crowded with culture*—the cities on the mountain are the home of learning and culture.

Lines 17—28. All the peaks soar......Some on our Shoulder.

There are a number of peaks and all of them rise high. But one of them is higher than the others. It is encircled with clouds. There

is to be seen a ray of bright light on this peak. It is not light of the morning, it comes from the fort, standing on that peak. They would bury their master on this peak. They would go up there. The singer asks the other disciples as to why they do not begin to climb. Are they waiting for any signal from him ? As they begin to move, he compares their own lives with that of their master. Their life is the life of the plain and the night, while his life was the life of the morning. In other words, they pass their lives surrounded by the darkness of ignorance, while his life was passed in the light of knowledge and culture. He then warns the other disciples to walk in a dignified manner with their heads raised high, and their chests square, for there are on-lookers, watching their movements. They must remembor that their master, whose body they are carrying, was famous, calm and self-controlled. Now he is dead, and their tribute to him must be worthy of his greatness.

One the rest excels—one of the peaks is higher than the others.

Overcome it—cover it ; encircle it.

Yonder sparkle—the flash of light on the peak. *Is the Citadel's*—comes from the fort on the peak. *No*—it is not the light of morning. *Circling*—situated on.

Wind we up the heights—we shall climb up the mountain.

Wait Ye the warning ?—Are you waiting for some signal ? Why do you not begin moving ?

The level's—of the plains, where there is darkness and ignorance. *Of the Night's*—of the darkness of ignorance. *He is for the morning*—his life was a life of learning and culture.

Step to a tune—move forward as if in harmony with a song.

Square chests—chests erect. *Erect each head*—with head raised high. *Ware the beholders*—There are onlookers watching them, so they must move with due dignity.

Famous, calm and dead—they must remember that they are carrying the body of their dead master, who in life was famous and self-controlled. Their tribute to him must be appropriate and dignified.

Lines 29—52. Sleep, crop and herd......learned we found him.

The disciples of the dead scholar climb up the mountain carrying the body of their master on their shoulders. The plains with their crops, with their cattle, with their fields and villages, are left behind. People there sleep comfortably in all their ingorance. In the plains, they are quite safe from storms and snowfalls.

The people in the plain are ignorant, while their master was learned and cultured. In his youth, he was handsome and healthy as Apollo, the god of poetry and music. For a long time, he remained obscure and unknown. But he worked hard to acquire knowledge. In his youth, he did not know that the spring of his youth would soon be overtaken by the winter of old age. The old age came rather

too soon, as a result of his excessive devotion to his studies. At the touch of disease caused by overwork, his youth was gone. He became old, shrunken and withered with his power and energy much diminished. But he did not groan, nor did he say that his career was over, and now others should take his place, and dance their own dance, *i.e.*, and live the life of their choice. In other words, he did not stop working even when he had grown old and diseased. He knew that others do so, but he did not follow their example. He continued to work hard at his studies (At this point the speaker directs the other disciples to keep to the mountain side and move upward towards the city at the top). Their master knew that old age is the signal of death, but still he continued to work hard. He did not seek the sympathy of others. He was too proud and dignified for that. He did not rest or relax but continued to study and acquire knowledge. He wanted to understand the mystery of the world and human life which has always eluded the grasp of scholars. He wanted to know the mystery which is hidden in the rolled up books of knowledge. He wanted to know the views of poets, scholars and learned philosophers. He, therefore, led the life of a scholar and became well-read in what others have said in their books about the mystery of the world and the nature of man. When they came to him, they found him a learned man in the real sense of the word.

Darkling thorpes—villages surrounded by the darkness of ignorance. *Crofts*—fields.

Safe from the weather—the ignorant people in the plains live a life secure from the effects of snow and storm. They live in ignorant bliss.

Convoy—carry. *Aloft*—high up on the mountain. *Lyric Apollo*—Apollo is called, 'lyric', because he was the god of music and poetry in classical mythology. He is represented as young, handsome and healthy.

Nameless—unknown and obscure. *Spring*—A man in his youth, the spring-time of human life. *Winter*—old age which destroys youth, as winter destroys spring.

The little touch—the touch of disease caused by overwork.

Cramped—withered and shrunken owing to old age. *Diminished*—with reduced energy and power. *Moaned he* ?—did he moan ? *i.e.*, he did not groan or complain.

New measures, others anon—let other people now dance their dance in their own way. Let others now work. *My dance is finished*—I have grown old, and the work of my life is over.

No, that is the world's way—he did not groan or complain or give up his work. It is the way of ordinary people. It was not his way.

The signal—that old age is the signal of death. *Stepped on...... man's pity*—continued to work, too proud to care for man's pity and sympathy.

Grappled with the world—worked hard to understand the mystery of life. *Bent on escaping*—the mystery of life which has always eluded the grasp of scholars.

Scroll—learned books. *Furled*—closed. *Their shaping*—their view of the mystery of the world and human life.

Gowned him—led the life of a scholar. *The book*—learning, books which deal with the world and human life. *To its last page*—fully; became a profound scholar.

Lines 53—64. Yea, but we fonnd him......nor feel queasy.

The Grammarian devoted himself night and day to the study of books, with the result that he grew learned. But he also became old before his time. He became old, his eyes lost their brightness and because of physical weakness, he could talk only in a halting, incoherent manner. Another man in his place would have said that he had acquired enough knowledge, and now it was time for him to give up his seclusion and his books which come in the way of the enjoyment of life. But this man, the grammarian, said that real life is not in this world, but in the world to come. Life in this world is merely a preparation for the life to come. Therefore, he will study patiently for sometime more, and in this way prepare himself for enjoyment in the life to come. No doubt he had learned the original texts written in an involved and difficult style, but he had still to read the commentaries on these texts. He wanted to master the whole of knowledge. He did not want to be told that what he has acquired is enough, and that it is very difficult to acquire more knowledge. There was no question of more or less, easy or difficult, for him. He took all knowledge to be his province. He wanted to enjoy the feast of knowledge upto the very last crumb, and no amount of knowledge could create in him any feeling of uneasiness, or discomfort. He never grew sick or fed up with knowledge.

Eyes like lead—eyes grown dim as a result of too much study. *Accents uncertain*—A halting, incoherent way of speaking owing to physical weakness.

'Up with the curtain'—give up your seclusion and books which come in the way of the enjoyment of life.

Time to taste life—You have acquired enough knowledge, and now it is time for you to enjoy life.

"Actual life comes next"—The real life is the life after death; this life is merely a preparation for the life to come.

Patience a moment—'I will devote myself to my books for sometime more.'

Learning's crabbed texts—original texts written in a difficult and involved style.

The comment—the commentaries or criticism on the original texts.

Let me know all—he wanted to know all books, without exception.

Prate not—talk not. *Most or least*—that the learning you have acquired is sufficient ; more is not needed. *Painful or easy*—that it is very difficult to acquire knowledge.

Crumbs—the last piece of food left-over after a meal. *Fain*—gladly. *Nor feel queasy*—He wanted to enjoy the feast of knowledge, upto the last bit. He was sure that knowledge will not make him sick or uncomfortable. *Queasy*—inclined to vomit as a result of over-eating.

Lines 65—72. Oh, such a life as he......mortar dab brick.

The Grammarian was determined to acquire all knowledge, to know all about man and his life, before he actually began to live that life. In this passage. human life is being compared to a building, or a project. Before constructing a building we first prepare a chart of that building ; we try to form a clear idea of it in our imagination. Only when the entire conception of the building is clear to us, we proceed to construct it part by part. Only when the whole plan is clear, does a builder strike the stone with steel and plaster bricks with cement. Construction and execution come only after careful planning. Similar is the case with human life. We must first know all about. life, and then alone should we begin to enjoy it. That was why the Grammarian was resolved first to acquire learning and know fully about life. He spurned the idea of beginning to live sooner than *i e.*, before, he had acquired full understanding of life.

Such a live......learned it—he decided first to know about life, and then to begin to live it.

Sooner, he spurned it—he disliked the idea of beginning to live before acquiring full knowledge of life. *Sooner*—before.

Image—imagine. *The whole*—the whole building or project. Life is being compared to a building. *Execute the part*—construct the building, one part after another.

Fancy—imagine. *Fabric*—structure. *Quite*—fully.

Steel strike fire from quartz—before the actual work of construction starts and tools of steel strike stone to fashion it into shape *Quartz*—stone. *Mortar*—cement. *Dab*—plasters.

Lines 73—84. Here is the town gate...Man has Forever.

As the funeral procession marches up, they reach the town-gate and they see the market of the city opening wide before them. The singer asks his companions to take heart, for their journey is practically over and their destination is near.

Continuing with the enumeration of the many qualities of the dead Grammarian, the speaker points out that the distinctive quality of his character was that before beginning to live, he decided to acquire a knowledge of life. He decided that he would know fully about the mystery of man and his life, before he begins to live and enjoy life. There was no end to his learning. His principle was that before beginning to enjoy life, he should understanding life, for such understanding is necessary for real

enjoyment. He had full faith in God, and was sure that He would grant him a long life, so that he may put his learning to good use. There are others who lack faith in God. They say that time is passing swiftly, their life will soon come to end. Therefore, they should make hurry to enjoy, otherwise their life will come to an end. On the other hand, the dead scholar knew that the human soul does not die, it lives on in other worlds. He did not care for the present, for he had faith in the immortality of the human soul. Only the lower animals, like dogs and monkeys, worry for the present ; man should care for the future alone, the life to come. In this lies the superiority of man over animals.

Peculiar grace—distinctive quality.

Hearten—take courage, as the destination is near. Their journey is practically over.

Before living—before beginning to enjoy his life. *Learn how to life*—wanted to know the real nature and mystery of man and his life.

Earn the means first—acquire first the knowledge which will enable you to live in the real sense. *God will......our earning*—God will bless him with a long life so that he may use his learning. *Mistrust*—lack faith.

Man has for ever—The human soul is immortal, and in this he differs from the lower animals.

Lines 85—96. Back to his book then......sucked at the flagon.

So he returned to his studies. He became even more absorbed in his studies. The stoop in his shoulders grew worse ; he suffered from stone in the bladder and from various other bodily ailments. His eyes grew dull and lustreless as lead. He suffered from cough and bronchitis. His pupils asked him to rest, but he would not rest. The speaker now tells his companions to be more careful as the winding path is narrow there. They should walk two abreast. Again, returning to the life and character of their dead master he tells them that their master suffered, but he remained quite untroubled. He returned to his studies, with fresher energy and enthusiasm than before. With the energy of a dragon, he drained the cup of knowledge, as if he were thirsty with a soul-thirst, like a dropsical person, who has an insatiable thirst for water.

Deeper dropped his head—the stoop in his shoulder grew worse. *Calculus*—stone in the bladder. *Racked*—tormented.

Leaden before—his eyes were already dim. *His eyes grew dross of lead*—no, they became even more dull and devoid of light.

Tussis—Bronchial cough ; cough of a severe, tormenting kind.

Caution re-doubled......narrowly—the speaker warns his companions to be more careful, as the path grows narrower and so more dangerous. They should now climb two together.

Fresher than at first—the dead scholar returned to his studies with even greater zest than before. *Fierce as a dragon*—he attacked his books as fiercely as a dragon does his victims.

Soul hydroptic......thirst—his soul was as thirsty for knowledge as a person suffering from dropsy is for water. *Sacred thirst*—thirst for knowledge.

Sucked at the flagon—drunk from the flask of knowledge, like a thirsty person.

Lines 97—112. Oh, if we draw a circle...life's pale lure.

The dead Grammarian had noble ambitions. He did not care for gain or profit in this world ; he aimed at higher reward in the life to come. He was not one of those who have narrow, limited ambitions. Such people are losers in the long run. They may make some immediate profit in the present, but they lose the larger profits which result from prolonged effort and waiting. The dead scholar did not make this mistake. He devoted his life to study, and hoped to get his profits, not here, but in the life to come. It was heroic, splendid on his part. He had full faith in God, and he threw himself entirely on the mercy of God. He depended upon God to reward him in the other world, for his labour in this world. He knew that God alone can make the life in heaven perfect and complete the life in this world. He, therefore, did not care for earthly gains. Rather, he tried to enlarge his mind with knowledge, and understand the nature and mystery of life. He did not under-estimate life, nor discount his future reward by accepting reward on this earth in instalments. He was not prepared to accept his rewards in instalments, as ordinary people do—something here on this earth and then something more in heaven. He thought that it is better to reject one's reward on this earth so that one may get the whole of it in heaven. He preferred to get his reward in heaven, all at one time. He wanted all his rewards in heaven in a lump, and nothing short of it. He was asked whether he believed Death to be the end of all life. But he believed not in one, but in thousands of lives hereafter. So he boldly and firmly replied that, "he considered death to be only a preparation for another life, much more important and valuable than their present earthly life. So he did not value the attractions and pleasures of this world ; he was not afraid of death, rather he welcomed it."

Draw a circle premature—have narrow and limited ambitions. *For gains*—larger and higher profits which result from prolonged waiting.

Bad is our bargain—such people are losers in the long run.

Great—heroic, brave. *Did he not throw......on God*—he depended upon God.

To make the heavenly......the earthen—to perfect earthly life by rewarding it in the life to come. *Magnify the mind*—enlarge his mind and understanding through study. *Show clearly just what it all meant*—explained clearly the meaning of life.

He would not discount life—he did not discount his reward in heaven by accepting part of it in this world. *Discount*—lower the value of.

He ventured neck or nothing—he risked everything. *Heaven's success......failure*—if failure on earth means success in heaven, he certainly preferred it.

Wilt thou trust death or not ?—He believed that death does not mean the end of life ; it is simply a gateway to life in heaven. So he replied that he had full faith in life. *Hence with life's pale lure*—he did not care for the worthless attractions and pleasures of this world.

Lines 113—124. That low man seeks......shall find him.

These lines are among some of the most famous lines in Browning, and they convey a most clear and lucid account of his philosophy.

In this world, there are people of two kinds, low men with limited, small ambitions, and noble people, like the Grammarian, with high ambitions difficult to attain. The low men whose ambitions are small, and whose aims are limited, see clearly their goal and achieve it with a little effort. On the other hand, noble persons, like the Grammarian, have lofty ambitions. Their ideals are so high that they die even before they can form a clear idea of their ideals or objects of desire. The poet explairs the point through the use of an apt illustration. A low man is like a person who wants only a hundred rupees. He makes efforts, earns them little by little in instalments, and soon gets the hundred he wanted. Such a man is successful, according to the standards of this world. On the other hand, a noble person like the Grammarian, aims at not a hundred rupees, but at one million. His aims are high, he is ambitious, but his life ends, even before he has achieved a single unit. From the worldly point of view, he is a failure, but according to Browning's philosophy failure here means success in the other world. Such men of noble ideas and ideals may fail in this world, but they are sure to be rewarded in the life to come. The little man who gets success here, will not get any reward in the other world. He cared for this world alone, and let this world care for him. The man with noble ideals, on the other hand, has full faith in God. He searches for Him with courage and confidence and is not at all worried or troubled, if he fails by worldly standards. Such a noble person seeks God, and ultimately finds God, and is rewarded by Him. The dead Grammarian was a man of noble ideals and high ambitions.

Dies ere he knows it—dies even before he can form a clear idea of his high ambition.

Hit—achieved. *Misses an unit*—fails to achieve any success.

Has the world here—is successful according to worldly standards.

Let the world mind him—he cared only for this material world and let this world take care of him. He will get no reward in the world to come ; God will not care for him.

Throws himself on God—places himself entirely in the hands of God.

Lines 125–132. So, with the throttling...from the waist down.

The dead Grammarian was a brave scholar who continued to work hard at the study of Grammar, even upto the moment of his death. Even when he felt the suffocating hands of death at his throat, even when he was waging his last struggle, the struggle with Death, the great scholar did not cease his studies. Even when he was dying, and could utter only a halting and rattling sound, even when his speech grew halting and incoherent, he continued to discuss the rules of grammar, such as the use of various parts of speech. Even at the very last moment, when he could hardly stammer, he explained the correct use of the Greek particles as *Hoti* (because), *oun* (therefore), and *De*, which is prefixed to a word to give it a slightly different meaning. Even when the lower half of his body was paralysed, he continued his study and research in the principles of Greek grammar and syntax. His researches could throw light on many complex points of syntax and Grammar.

Throttling—suffocating. *Ground*—worked hard. *The rattle*—the rattling sound in a dying man's throat. *Were rife*—were plentiful, *i.e.*, were discussed at length.

Hoti—a Greek article meaning "because".

Settled......business—explained as to how it should be used.

Oun—a Greek adverb meaning 'therefore'.

Properly based on 'oun'—explained the proper use and nature of the Greek adverb 'oun'.

Enclitic—a word which is prefixed to another word to give it a slightly different meaning. 'De' is such a word in Greek Grammar. *Gave us the doctrine of*—developed and explained his theory about the use of.

Lines 133—148. Well, here is the platform...living and dying.

The funeral procession now reaches the highest peak of the mountain where there is a wide open space or platform. This the speaker considers to be a proper place for the burial of the dead Grammarian. The mountain peak is the haunt of such high flying birds as the swallows and the curlews. Like these birds, the Grammarian also soared high into the realms of knowledge, and so it is appropriate that he should be buried at the highest peak, the abode of these birds. The common men live in the plains below which are places of darkness and ignorance. But this Grammarian instead of living a life of ignorance like them, decided to soar high in the realms of knowledge, and, therefore, he should be buried on the highest peak. This is the place where the shooting stars are seen, where clouds form, and where lightning is released from the clouds, and where the stars rise in the evening and sink in the morning. Grandeur and loftiness of nature at this place is in harmony with the loftiness and sublimity of the soul of their master. His soul

will receive comfort and joy from the storms which break here, and peace will descend upon him with the dew. It is a fitting place of burial for this man of lofty ambitions and plans. He should be left buried at this lofty place. Both in his life and in his death, he was more sublime and lofty than can ever be imagined by the crowd of ignorant people who live in the plains below.

Purlieus—haunt ; abode. The speaker greets the place, the haunt of birds, as if it were some one living.

Highfliers.........race—birds which soar higher than other birds. *Curlews*—a kind of high flying bird.

Meteor—a shooting star.

17

Memorabilia

(a) THE POEM

I

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,
    And did he stop and speak to you,
And did you speak to him again ?
    How strange it seems and new !

II

But you were living before that,
    And also you are living after ;
And the memory I started at—
    My starting moves your laughter.

III

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own
    And a certain use in the world, no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone,
    'Mid the blank miles round about :

IV

For there I picked up on the heather
    And there I put inside my breast,
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather !
    Well, I forget the rest.

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

Memorabilia was published in the volume of poems entitled, *Men and Women*, 1855, and was re-published in 1863, in the *Dramatic Lyrics*. It is a short lyric in four stanzas, of four lines each. Though it is included in the *Dramatic Lyrics*, the poem is a personal lyric, as it grew out of a personal experience of the poet. Its title is Latin and it means, "things worth remembering."

The poet was a great lover of Shelley and had read his poems with zest. His early poem *Pauline* reveals Shelley's influence at

every step, and it also contains a glowing tribute to the poet. Once it so happened that on entering a book-stall, the poet heard another customer, a stranger, talking of Shelley and narrating how he had once met the great romantic poet and talked with him. Browning listened to him with open-eyed wonder. The man, to whom Shelley meant nothing, laughed at the, 'startled', look on the face of the poet. He could not appreciate his strange re-action.

In the present poem, Browning addresses the soul-less stranger and asks him if he really had the honour of meeting Shelley face to face and talking with him. It must have been a thrilling experience. He had been living even before he met the great romantic poet, and he continued to live even after the meeting. But the meeting with the poet must have transformed and illumined his life. At least, this must have been so in his case.

There are certain experiences in our life which alone are of value and significance, which alone are worth remembering. The rest of human life is barren and useless, like a wasteland. The poet illustrates the point through a metaphor taken from nature. Suppose a man journeys through a vast tract of wasteland. In one part of it, he finds a feather shed by an eagle and keeps it in his breast-pocket. He values it highly, and, while the rest of the wasteland is forgotten, the small bit of land, where he had found the feather, is always remembered. Similarly, there are a few experiences in life which are valuable and worth remembering. They are treasured in memory while many other things are forgotten.

Had he met Shelley and talked with him, he would have cherished the illuminating experience for ever and ever.

The language is lucid and clear. The poem is easy to understand. The symbolic use of nature is charming and illuminating. The metre used is *Iambic*, and alternate lines rhyme in each stanza.

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Stanza 1

Once in a second-hand book-stall the poet heard a man talking to the book-seller of something Shelley had once said to him. Browning, a great admirer of Shelley, looked at him with open-eyed wonder. The man, a stranger, laughed at seeing Browning startled so much. For him, Shelley meant nothing, and so he could not understand the strange reaction of Browning.

The poem is addressed to this stranger, this man without a soul. The poet asks him if he had the honour of meeting Shelley face to face and talking with him. It must have been a strange, and thrilling experience.

Plain—plainly ; face to face ; at close quarters.

Stanza 2

The man was living even before he met Shelley, and he continued to live even after his meeting with the poet. It seems that the

meeting with the great poet did not inspire him or make any difference in his life, for he laughed at the startled look on the face of the poet.

Stanza 3

In this stanza, the poet tells the stranger that meeting Shelley face to face would have made a great difference in his life. He explains the idea with reference to his experience on a wide, and barren moor. He crossed the vast wasteland which must have a name of its own and its own use and value. But for him a small space alone of that vast wasteland has value and significance, because there he had some inspiring experience.

Memorabilia—memorable things (Latin).

Moor—a tract of wasteland.

Shines alone—is alone of significance to the poet. *Blank miles*—the vast expanse of the wasteland.

Stanza 4

A little space of the moor is of significance for the poet, for it was there that he found a feather which had been shed by an eagle. He placed the feather inside his breast-pocket, and has forgotten everything else about the moor. In the same way, in a man's life there are certain experiences which are inspiring and illuminating. Only such moments in life count ; the rest of the life is like a vast desert of little significance. For him, talking with Shelley would have been such an illuminating experience.

Heather—an expanse of wasteland ; a desert.

A moulted-feather—a feather shed by a bird.

18

Rabbi Ben Ezra

(*a*) THE POEM

I

Grow old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made :
Our times are in His hand
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half ; trust God ; see all, nor be afraid"

II

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed "Which rose make ours,
Which lily leave and then as best recall ?"
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned "Nor Jove, nor Mars ;
Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all !"

III

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate : folly wide the mark !
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast :
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men ;
Irks care the crop-full bird ? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast ?

V

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide,
And not partake, effect and not receive.
A spark disturbs our clod ;
Nearer we hold of God,
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

VI

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go !
Be our joys three-parts pain !
Strive, and hold cheap the strain ;
Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge the throe !

VII

For thence,—a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,—
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail :
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me :
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

VIII

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play ?
To man, propose this test—
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way ?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use :
I own the Past profuse
Of power each side, perfection every turn :
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole ;
Should not the heart beat once: "How good to live and learn"?

X

Not once beat, "Praise be Thine !
I see the whole design,
I, who saw power, see now love perfect too :
Perfect I call Thy plan :
Thanks that I was a man !
Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do !"

XI

For pleasant is this flesh ;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest ;
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best !

XII

Let us not always say,
"Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole !"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry, "All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul !"

XIII

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term :
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute ; a god though in the germ.

XIV

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and new :
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armor to indue.

XV

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby ;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold :
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame :
Young, all lay in dispute ; I shall know, being old.

XVI

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the gray :
A whisper from the west
Shoots—"Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth ; here dies another day."

XVII

So, still within this life,
Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
"This rage was right i' the main,
That acquiescence vain :
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

XVIII

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day :
Here, work enough to watch
The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made :
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age : wait death, nor be afraid !

XX

Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past !
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained,
Right ? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last !

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate ?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive ;
Ten who in ears and eyes
Match me : we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that : whom shall my soul believe ?

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass
Called "work," must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price ;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice :

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account ;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount :

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped ;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor ! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change ; the Past gone, seize to-day !"

XXXII

Fool ! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall ;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure :
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be :
Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII

He fixed thee 'mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest :
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX

What though the earlier grooves
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press ?
What though, about thy rim,
Skull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress ?

XXX

Look not thou down but up !
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow !
Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with earth's wheel ?

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest men ;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I,—to the wheel of life
With shapes and colors rife,
Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst :

XXXII

So, take and use Thy work :
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim !
My times be in Thy hand !
Perfect the cup as planned !
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same !

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Date of Publication : The Central Character

Rabbi Ben Ezra was first published in the volume of Browning's poems entitled *Dramatis Personae*, 1864. *Rabbi* in the Hebrew tongue means one learned, in theology and religious philosophy. Ben ('Ben' is a corruption of the Arabic word 'Ibn' meaning 'son'). Ezra was such a Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages. He was born in Spain in 1092, and died in Rome in 1167, leaving behind him a number of works on religious philosophy, and a rich collection of poems. There are critics like **I.A. Cambpell** who are of the view that the philosophy of the poem is indeed the philosophy of Rabbi Ben Ezra. But we cannot agree with this view. Though there is little doubt that Browning was familiar with works of the great Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, the philosophy expressed in

the poem is that of Browning himself. The apparent resemblance between the views expressed in the poem and those held by the great Rabbi may be accounted for by the fact that both of them were well-read in the Bible, and the work was the common source of their inspiration.

The Rabbi : a Spokesman of Browning's Philosophy

The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue and the great Rabbi is the speaker. But, as a matter of fact, he is the mouthpiece of Browning, and it is not his views but the views of the poet which he expresses. The poem is chiefly valuable as a complete and lucid expression of Browning's cheerful optimism. Incidentally, in the poem he gives a convincing reply to Epicurean philosophers, like Omar Khayyam, whose poems had recently been translated into English by Edward Fitzgerald. The mood is reflective, a mood of calm contemplation and spiritual serenity, and the speaker, as he surveys life from the vantage point of old age, expresses triumphantly his faith in the value and significance of human life. The four important aspects of Browning's philosophy are (1) faith in the organic wholeness of human life, *i.e.*, youth is consummated in old age, and hence the value and significance of old age (2) the value of struggle which alone can lead to achievement and spiritual development (3) Faith in death which is a gateway to the life in the other world, and which is the end and the consummation of life in this world, and (4) Faith in God and in the immortality of the human soul in the perpetual flux of circumstance. All these four aspects of the poet's philosophy are presented in the poem, logically and in detail.

Development of Thought

W.L. Phelps gives a lucid account of the development of thought in the poem. The drawbacks and sufferings of life are a part of the divine machinery employed by Him in His infinite wisdom to further human development, to make man ultimately fit to see His face. There can be no true progress without overcoming obstacles : no enjoyment without sorrow and suffering : no vacation without duties : no virtue without sin.

The Monologue opens in an abrupt, conversational style. "The second line of the poem is startling in its direct contradiction of the language and lamentations of conventional poetry"—(**Phelps**). Regret for lost youth and terror at the approach of old age are stock ideas in poetry, and in human meditation ; but here we are invited to look forward to old age as the best time of life. Not to grow old merrily gracefully and in resignation, but to grow old eagerly, in triumph—this is the Rabbi's suggestion. There is not the slightest doubt that he is right, provided one lives a mental, rather than an animal existence. "God loveth whom He chasteneth. Our doubts and fears, our sorrows and pains, are spurs, stimulants to spiritual progress, rejoice that we have them, for they are proofs that we are alive and moving." They differentiate man from the animals.

In the seventh stanza comes a bold but cheering thought. Many thinkers regard the deepest sorrow of life as rising from the disparity between our ideals and our achievement. Browning says boldly,

What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me ;

This paradox, which comforts while it mocks, means, "My achievements are ridiculously small in comparison with my hopes, my ambitions, my dreams : 'thank God for all this ! Thank God I was not content with low aims' thank God I had my aspirations and have them still : they point to future development."

In the twenty-third, twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth stanzas, Browning suddely returns to this idea : efforts, which, if unsuccessful, count for nothing in worldly estimation, are of enormous good for the life to come and must, therefore, be rated high. The reason why the world counts only things done and not things attempted, is because the world's standard are too coarse : they can judge only gross and obvious results. "You cannot weigh diamonds on hay scales ; the indicator would show precisely nothing. And yet one diamond, too fine for these huge scales, might be of more value than thousands of tons of hay". (**Phelps**).

From the twenty-sixth stanza to the end, Browning takes up the figure of the Potter, the wheel and the clay. In Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam* much is made of the Potter, meaning blind destiny ; and the moral is, "Drink ! the Past is gone, seize today." "Browning explicitly rejects and scorns this teaching, it is propounded by fools for the benefit of other fools." In Browning's metaphor, the Potter is God : the wheel is the whirling course of life's experiences : the Clay is man. God holds us on the wheel to turn us into the proper shape. "Owing to our flaws, the strain is sometimes too great, and some of us are warped and twisted by this stern discipline : other characters, made of better material, constantly grow more beautiful and more serviceable under the treatment." Browning had suffered the greatest sorrow of his life (the death of Mrs. Browning) when he wrote this poem, and yet he had faith enough to say in the thirty-first stanza, that not even while the whirl was worst, did he, bound dizzily to the terrible wheel of life, once lose his belief that he was in God's hands, and that the deep cuttings were for his ultimate benefit.

"In the making of a cup, the Potter engraves around the base lovely images of youth and pleasure, and near the rim skulls and signs of death : but what is a cup for ? It is meant for the Master's lips. The nearer, therefore, we approach death, the nearer we are to God's presence, who is making us fit to slake his thirst ! Finished at last, we have done forever with life's wheel : we come to the banquet, the festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal, the glorious appearance of the Master." (**Phelps**).

A Great Religious Poem

The poem has come in for a great deal of praise on the part of critics. It has been called the finest meditative and reflective poem

in the English language. It has been called a great religious poem. Admiring it, **Arthur Symons** writes that in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, "Browning has crystallized his religious philosophy into a shape of abiding beauty. It has been called, not rashly, the noblest of modern religious poems. Alike in substance and in form, it belongs to the highest order of meditative poetry, and it has in Browning's work an almost unique quality of grave beauty, of severe restraint, of earnest and measured enthusiasm. What *the Psalm of Life* is to the people who do not think, *Rabbi Ben Ezra* might and should be to those who do ; a light through the darkness, a lantern of guidance and a beacon of hope, to the wanderers lost and weary".

The Note of Optimism

Rabbi Ben Ezra is one of those poems that mould character. Certainly, Browning's message in the poem is an optimistic one. It is not a cheap optimism, an optimism which is blind to the presence of Evil or the suffering of mankind. The poem shows that the poet is aware of the sorrow and suffering of man, of the pangs and agonies, failures and disappointments, that he has to undergo. But he derives hope from this very imperfection of human life. Having an unshakable faith in God and the immortality of the soul, he teaches us that failure in this life means success in the life to come, and sincere struggle and effort is sure to be rewarded, if not in this life, then in life to come. To Browning, the worst of sin is passive acceptance, sloth and indifference, for who struggles and works can always hope. It is better to strive and to fail, than to make no effort at all. We are in the hands of God, and He will certainly give us our due :

> *All I could never be,*
> *All men ignored in me,*
> *This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.*

In the poem he, again and again, reaffirms the nobility and superiority of Man,

> *Rejoice, we are allied*
> *To that which doth provide,*
> *And not partake, effect and not receive.*

Thus Man has the divine in him ; he is more akin to God than to "dogs and apes". And Man's soul is immortal :

> *Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure :*
> *What entered into thee*
> *That was, is, and shall be ;*
> *Time's wheel runs back or stops : Potter and clay endure.*

Browning's optimism is not a cheap optimism. The poem convincingly brings out that he is aware of, "the skull things", that crowd round old age, and of, "the rebuffs", which, "turn earth's smoothness rough". Browning does not shut his eyes to this fact, only he asks us to look beyond life, regard this life as a period of training, and have faith in the immortality of the soul and the mercy of God. It is because of this robust and cheerful optimism that **Hugh Walker** writes of the

poem, "No more confident and triumphant poem was ever written, it has the magnificent faith of certain of the Psalms."

The Style

The style of the poem, no doubt, presents certain difficulties for the readers. It is not entirely free from the grotesqueries and eccentricities of the poet. There are a number of inverted constructions and omissions which make stanzas like the 9th, 12th, 22nd, 29th, and many others, rather difficult to follow without an exhaustive commentary. At least one line in the poem has been criticised by all critics as ugly and revolting :

Irks Care the Crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast.

The poem may be a little difficult, but there is certainly no obscurity in it. Every line can be understood after a little painstaking. And the imagery of the poem is exquisite. It is also symbolic. Such is the image of the potter and his wheel.

Versification

The poem consists of thirty-two stanzas of six lines each. The measure used is *Iambic.* In each stanza, there are four short lines of six syllables, one line, the third, of ten syllables, and the last, sixth, is an *Alexandrine* i.e. a line of a twelve syllables. The use of the *Alexandrine* creates an effect of slow movement, of repose and serenity. The rhyme scheme is *a a b c c b.*

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Stanza 1

The great Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages, Ben Ezra, invites us to grow old in his company. He does not regard old age as the worst part of life ; rather he regards it as the best part. In his philosophy, old age is the consummation of human life, and the period of youth is but a preparation for it. Man and his future, his life, are completely in the hands of God. Life was planned by him as a complete whole, in which each part has its value and significance for the whole. Youth is only one half of human life, and old age is the other half. Therefore, one should not be afraid of old age ; rather one should welcome it. We should have full faith in God, and go through the whole of life, including old age, without fear of any kind.

Rabbi—a doctor or scholar of Jewish law and religion. *Ben Ezra*—Ibn Ezra *i. e.* son of Ezra. The Rabbi mentioned here was a famous Jewish scholar of the Middle Ages, but the philosophy expounded here is largely the philosophy of Robert Browning. We come across it in the poet's other poems as well.

The best is yet to be—the Rabbi regards old age as the best part of human life.

Our times—our life ; our future. *See all*—if you see the whole design, there shall be no need for fear and pessimism.

Stanza 2

The Rabbi does not find fault with the hopes and desires of youth. In youth, a man has many desires which may be likened to flowers, roses and lilies. A youth has numerous desires and he cannot decide which particular desire he should reject, and which he should try to achieve, like a lady with too full a store of fine dresses. He rejects one desire as worthless, but later on remembers it and sighs for it. He regrets that he rejected it. In the same way, youth is also a period of noble ideas and ideals. A young-man is not satisfied with the real and the actual, but aspires much higher. These high ideals of youth may be compared to stars. Such bright stars as Jove and Mars do not satisfy him ; he yearns for stars which would combine the glory and beauty of all stars, and would be more splendid and brilliant than any known stars. However, such noble aspirations and ideals are natural to youth, and the Rabbi sees no harm in them.

Amassing—culling ; gathering. *As best recall*—first reject as worthless, and then remember it and yearn for it.

Figured flame—some imagined star. *Blends*—combines in itself the beauty of many stars. *Transcends*—outshines.

Stanza 3

Youth is a period of hopes and fears, but the Rabbi does not find fault with such hopes and fears. A youth hopes that his desires and ideals would be fulfilled, and he is also afraid that he may fail to achieve his aspirations. But the Rubbi does not regard such hopes and fears as mere waste of time. He does not consider them as sheer folly. As a matter of fact, these fears and hopes, desires and ideals, distinguish a man from the lower animals. The lower animals are perfect pieces of clay without any soul or the spark of the divine in them. That is why they have no infinite longings and aspirations. In other words, the hopes and fears of youth are an indication of the divine in him, of the presence of the Infinite within him.

Anulling—putting to waste, wasting the energy and time of the youth. *Remonstrate*—object to ; complain of ; find fault with. *Folly wide the mark*—it is not folly which never reaches its aim, like a arrow which falls wide of the mark.

Prize—value. *Low kinds*—the lower animals. *Clods*—perfect pieces of clay. *Finite*—having no infinite aspirations. *Untroubled by a spark*—untroubled by any doubts and fears, the indications of the divine in man.

Stanza 4

Human life would be empty and meaningless, if its sole purpose were the gratification of physical desires. If Man were created merely

to eat and drink and indulge in physical pleasures, like the lower animals, and had no higher purpose in life, then his life would be futile and fruitless. In that case, man will perish and his life come to an end as soon as he has gratified his desires. But this is not so. Man has fears and doubts and this shows that he has a soul which is immortal, and which does not end with the death of the body. In this respect, man is superior to the bird, which is not troubled by any cares and worries as soon as its hunger is satisfied, and to the beast which is not troubled by any doubts as soon as its stomach is filled.

Poor vaunt of life—human life would be empty and meaningless. *Crop full*—with a full stomach. *Irks care......bird*—the bird with a full stomach is not troubled by any care. ***Maw crammed***—with a full stomach. ***Frets***—troubles.

Stanza 5

Man should rejoice that he is allied to God, that he is akin to Him, who provides for others, and not to those, the lower creatures, who merely, passively, receive the favours of God. He does receive favours, like the lower creatures, but, like God, he is also a doer and creator. Though he is of the earth, like the lower animals, yet he has the divine within him. The stirrings of doubts and fears in his soul are the divine element in him. It is for this reason that he is nearer to God, and has greater claim to kinship with God than the lower animals, who simply receive what God gives, and have no divine stirring within them.

Allied—related to ; akin to. *Effect and not receive*—God who creates and gives to others, but does not Himself receive. *Clod*—the body made of earth. *Nearer we hold to God*—we can claim a nearer relationship with God than the lower animals can. ***His tribes***—the lower animals.

Stanza 6

Since man is akin to God and superior to the lower animals, he should not be afraid of misfortunes and failures which disturb the smooth course of his life. Rather, he should welcome such misfortunes. They should incite him to even greater effort, instead of discouraging him. He should welcome even that joy which is obtained through three times the pain and trouble. He should labour hard to achieve progress and should not care for any amount of trouble and difficulty he may have to face. He should gain experience and knowledge, he should do bold deeds, without caring for the dangers and difficulties that may beset his path.

Rebuff—misfortune. ***That turns.........rough***—that disturbs the smooth course of life on this earth.

Sting—sting of misfortune. *Grudge the throe*—one should not mind the pain and suffering one has to undergo for noble achievement.

Stanza 7

Man should strive without caring for the pain and suffering he

has to undergo. From this view, the Rabbi derives a conclusion which is rather paradoxical (A paradox is a statement, the two parts of which have opposite meaning. For example, failure implies success). The paradox is that what seems to man as failure, is in reality a success. This may seem to be something mocking or ironical, but in reality this conclusion must be a source of great comfort to man. A man should judge his success not by the result, but by the labour, the effort he has put in to achieve his aspirations. A failure is in itself a success, it implies effort and noble aspiration. He must derive comfort, from the fact that he has aspired and made efforts, and has in this way asserted his superiority over the lower animals. A beast has no aspirations ; a man without aspirations would be like a beast. He would go down in the scale of creation.

Shall life succeed—life shall succeed. *What I aspired to be......... ...comforts me*—Man should derive consolation from his noble aspirations, even though he could not achieve them.

Stanza 8

One whose body has a soul just fitted to it, is no better than a brute. It is only in the case of a brute that body and soul are identical ; in the case of man the soul must be much higher than the body. A man is not satisfied when his physical needs are gratified ; he has much higher needs *i.e.*, spiritual needs. Unlike the beast, a man does not work merely to ensure physical satisfaction. The test of a man is that his body exerting itself to the utmost should be at the service of the soul. The body should push forward the soul on its lonely path of spiritual development. Each one has to work out his or her own spiritual salvation, and the body should be of help in this task. In the beast, the soul is slave to the body ; in man, the body is used for the good of the soul. This is the difference between man and beast.

Whose flesh has soul to suit—whose soul is just suited to the needs of the body ; the soul is a slave to the body. *Lest arms and legs want play*—lest his body should not be able to exercise its function.

Propose this test—this is the test which distinguishes man from the beast. *At its best*—exercising its functions to the utmost. *Project*—push forward ; help to move on.

Stanza 9

No doubt, as the Rabbi has told us in the previous stanza, the soul is more than the body. But this does not mean that the body has no value. Quite to the contrary, the physical powers of man are also the gifts of God, and they also have their own value and their own function. We must show our gratitude to God by putting even our physical powers to good use. The Rabbi acknowledges that the best part of his life *i.e.*, his youth was a blessing to him, for it was in his youth that he developed profusely and perfected the powers of his senses and other physical organs. It was in youth that his

eyes, ears, and other senses were developed through his experiences of life. The various experiences were organised and stored by the brain. Therefore, his heart—the heart of man—should throb with gratitude to God for all that he has learned and gained in his youth. It is in the fitness of things that he should be grateful to God even for the body, through which he has acquired such experience and knowledge.

Yet gifts should prove their use—the body is also a gift of God, and so the body also must be put to good use. *Past*—the period of youth. *Profuse of power*—a period when my physical powers were abundantly developed. *Their dole*—their share of knowledge and experience. *Beat*—throb with gratitude.

Stanza 10

The heart of the great Rabbi throbs with gratitude to God for all the knowledge and experience he gained in this youth. The Rabbi now realises the wisdom and perfection of God's plan which forms a continuous whole from beginning to end. There are no breaks or gaps in the design of God ; one part is linked up with the other to form a perfect and organic whole. Thus youth and age are inter-connected ; age is the perfection of youth. It the knowledge and experience gained in youth which leads to the wisdom of old age. In his youth, the Rabbi saw the evidence of God's power in the universe, now he sees the evidence of His love as well. God is not only power, he is love as well. God's plan, His design of human life, is perfect ; the Rabbi can find no flaws in it. He has full confidence in God, he places himself entirely in the hands of God, and wishes that He should shape and mould him according to His own Will. Whatever God does shall be the best for him.

Thank, that I was a man—the Rabbi is thankful to God for the privilege of being a man. *Maker, remake, complete*—the Rabbi places himself in the hands of God, and prays to Him to mould him in the way He thinks best.

Stanza 11

The life of the flesh has its own pleasures and charms. Our soul is a prisoner in a beautiful body, hence the poet calls it a "rose mesh". The body drags down the soul towards earthy pleasures, while the soul struggles to rise upwards. Torn by this conflict, the soul yearns for rest. The Rabbi wishes that the soul should get some reward for its upward strivings, equal to the 'Joys of the brute'. The brute gets his pleasures without any struggle or spiritual strivings, and so the joys of the brute are called, 'possessions'. The human soul, on the other hand, has to struggle against the lure of the flesh for spiritual advancement and its reward, its pleasures, must be proportionate to its struggles.

Rose-mesh—this beautiful snare of the body ; Browning compares the body to a net made of roses. The earthly pleasures are charming like roses, and they ensnare the human soul. *Possessions of the brute*—

the pleasures of the flesh, for which the brute has to wage no struggle. *Gain most.........best*—gain a reward proportionate to our spiritual struggles.

Stanza 12

The stanza contains the very core of Browning's philosophy. Both the body and the soul are the gifts of God, and hence both of them have their own value and significance. Man should not think and act as if there were a hostility between the soul and the flesh. He should not think that he has made spiritual progress in spite of the retarding influence of the flesh. Such a spirit shows ingratitude to God. As a matter of fact, the soul and the body are not antagonistic to each other. Rather, they perfect each other. So man should sing cheerfully, like a bird, that God has created such beautiful things of the world for his enjoyment, that the flesh and the soul help each other, and that both are equally necessary. Thus it becomes clear that Browning advocates neither sensual indulgence, nor an ascetic denial of the flesh. "*The ideal, according to him, is that both body and soul should work together, each for the other's good.*"

Spite—in spite of the hostility of.

Stanza 13

Youth is a period when man struggles hard to acquire knowledge and experience. Youth is a period of preparation, so to say, for the wisdom and wider outlook which comes with old age. This wisdom is the heritage of youth, to which the youth is entitled by virtue of its struggle for knowledge and experience. Therefore, the poet calls upon old age to grant youth, now stepping into the maturity which comes with age, the wider outlook and capacities with which the youth has become fitted at this stage. The struggles of youth, struggles for knowledge and experience, entitle him to be called a Man in the real sense of the word. It is these struggles which distinguish him from the brute. It is through these struggles alone, that he can achieve manhood in the real sense and become a God, though in the embryo. It is only in this sense that his soul is purified of evil and the good in him is developed. It is only in this way that the divine element in him is developed, and he gets nearer to God.

Youth's heritage—wisdom and widened outlook which youth should acquire in old age. *Term*—stage. *Approved*—confirmed; certified. *For aye*—for ever. *Removed*—superior to.

Stanza 14

Old age is a period of rest. Man has struggled hard in his youth, and he pauses in his struggles and takes rest in his old age. In this way, he recoups his energy and prepares himself for fresh struggle in the life to come. His struggle in the next world is bound to be an easier one. He would not have so many cares and worries, for he knows what is good for him and how he should struggle for it. He

would go fearlessly to his battles in the next world, for now he knows what weapons he should use, and how he should protect himself from evil and temptation. According to Browning's philosophy, just as youth is a preparation for old age, so life in this world is a preparation for life in the other world.

Thereupon—after the struggles of youth. *Be gone*—die and go to the other world. *Next*—in the other world. *Armours to indue*—what armour to put on for my protection.

Stanza 15

The Rabbi further says that now that his youth is over and he has grown old, he is in a position to look back calmly at his life and form a correct estimate of his success or failure, what he has lost and what he has gained. He has gained wisdom and understanding and so he now knows that though the passions of youth and its energies have been lost, there is left behind the pure gold of wisdom and experience. He can now calmly assess his life, and judge what has been praiseworthy in it and what bad and undesirable. In youth, he remained lost in doubts ; he could not judge the real worth and significance of his life. Now that he has grown old, he has acquired the necessary discrimination to form a correct estimate of his own life. Thus old age is valuable , it is the period of calm thinking when a man judges dispassionately his own achievements.

Try—calculate. *Thereby*—with the wisdom and discrimination which comes with age. *The fire ashes*—the wasted energies and passions of youth. *Lay in dispute*—was uncertain and doubtful. *Know*—judge ; form a correct estimate.

Stanza 16

In this stanza the Rabbi compares old age to evening, the close of day. We stop our activities in the evening, for a short time. In the evening, a sunset-glow changes the grey sky into red. "The sunset admonishes us that the day has become a part of the past". We muse on the good or bad acts which have been done during the day. Similar is the case with old age. In old age, all the deeds of one's youth are reviewed in calm perspective. Gains or losses of youth are calculated dispassionately and calmly.

Shuts—falls.

A certain moment cuts the deeds off—When the day is over, the sun sets. There is pause in work for a short time and we stop our daily routine.

Calls the glory from the grey—At the time of sunset, there is a glow in the sky, which makes it red instead of grey. *Glory*—the sunset-glow.

A whisper from the west shoots—The glow of the sunset is like a whisper, telling us that the day is over.

"Add this to the rest......here dies another day"—This whisper says that this day is over and has become part and parcel of the past.

Now one can judge what good things have been done during this day. Everything is correctly revaluated and assessed after the day is over.

Stanza 17

Just as the close of day is the time when one ponders and muses over his failure and success during the day, so old age is the time when a man examines his past calmly. Old age is the time when the struggles of life are over and man has leisure to scrutinise, judge, and pronounce judgment over his past life. When looking back over his youth from the vantage point of old age, a man realises that some of his passions and enthusiasm, some of the ideals for which he struggled hard, were wholly right, while he was wrong and foolish in his acceptance of some particular point of view. In this way, he can form a comparative estimate of the success or failure of his life. He realises that the experiences through which he has passed, the struggle he has gone through, would be valuable to him in the life to come. He can, therefore, face the future with confidence, for his skill and wisdom have increased. Life is a continuous whole, youth is a preparation for old age, and this life itself is a period of preparation for the life to come. In Browning's philosophy, it is "experience" which counts, and not success or failure as such.

Though lifted over its strife—though the struggle of life is over. *Rage*—enthusiasm or passion. *Acquiescence*—passive acceptance. *Vain*—wrong and foolish. *Proved the past*—Tested the past ; judged and examined its worth, and so realised the value of "experience" that has been gained.

Stanza 18

Man is the only one of the creatures who can benefit from his past struggles and experiences. The wisdom and experience acquired through the struggles of youth prepares the human soul, and gives it courage and self-confidence to face the future. What he learns in this life, he can put to good use in life to come. In this life more is not given to man than to watch Providence at work. An apprentice learns the mysteries of his craft and the use of his tools, by watching his master at work. In the same way, man should watch the working of Providence, develop his faculties and learn the art of living. This life is meant for gaining wisdom through struggles and experience, which prepare the soul for the life to come.

Reserved—given. *Nerved*—prepared ; given strength and self-confidence and thus prepared for the life to come. *Tomorrow*—in the life to come. *Proper craft*—the art of living. *Tools*—the various faculties of man. *Tricks*—way ; secret. *True play*—successful use.

Stanza 19

In youth, it is better that a man should struggle to achieve his ideals, even though often his ways are clumsy and wrong. Even such struggle, through a process of trial and error, towards some noble

achievement, is preferable to a passive acceptance of what already exists and has been achieved by others. Just as youth is a period of struggle, so old age is a period of rest. In this part of life, there should be no further struggle. Rather, the old man should judge and examine and in this way acquire wisdom and understanding. He should learn to discriminate between good and bad. Just as in youth a man prepares and waits for old age, similarly, in old age he should prepare and wait for death. He should not fear death, for the experience and wisdom he has gained would be of great use to him in the life to come.

Uncouth—clumsy ; wrong. *Making*—some noble achievement. *Repose on*—accept passively. *Ought found made*—what has been achieved by others. *Tempt*—attempt ; strive. *Waitedest*—waits for.

Stanza 20

It is enough now, at this stage of our life, if one can discriminate between the right, the good, and the Infinite. It is enough in this life, if a man can know what is good and what is bad as clearly and definitely as he knows his own hand. In one's youth, one is beset with foolish doubts and uncertainties which crowd in upon him from all sides. It is only in old age that all doubts are removed and one is perfectly sure of the Right and the Good. This knowledge and wisdom should give the old man courage and self-confidence to face the future. He need not suffer from a sense of loneliness and insecurity, for he has wisdom and experience to help him and befriend him.

Named—recognized ; known. *With knowledge absolute*—clearly and definitely. *Disputes*—uncertainties. *Fools*—foolish doubts that beset youth. *Nor let thee feel alone*—the old man need not feel insecure and weak like a man without a friend.

Stanza 21

The great Jewish scholar continues to emphasize the value and significance of old age. With old age comes wisdom and discrimination which enable the old man to judge and differentiate between what was foolish and what was wise, or what was low and what was high in his past life. In old age, he can correctly evaluate his own past actions, as well as those of others, and assign to them their proper place and value. Now, he can judge for himself whether the world, who criticized him, or he, who looked down with contempt upon the world, was right. He can now form a comparative estimate of his own youthful struggles and aspirations. Old age is r the period of struggle ; it is the period of calm and quite meditation and reflection.

Be there—in old age. *Severed*—separated. *Announced to his......* *a st*—To each should be assigned its proper place and value. *A aigned*—criticised ; found fault with. *Disclaimed*—hated ; looked d vn upon. *Speak the truth*—pronounce correct judgment. *Peace*

at last—Old age is a period of calm and spiritual serenity when all doubts and uncertainties are set at rest. It is a period of *reflection* and *not of action*.

Stanza 22

Opinions differ widely from person to person. What he hates, says the Rabbi, is loved by many others. What he follows and accepts is avoided and disliked by others. Men are all alike as far as their physical self is concerned. All have similar eyes and ears, and other bodily organs. In this respect, all men are equals, but they differ widely in their conjectures, views and opinions. Under the circumstances, it becomes difficult to decide which particular opinion is right and which is wrong. Man is bewildered and baffled with doubts and does not know what to accept as true and what to reject.

Arbitrate—decide ; judge. *Slight*—hate ; disparage. *Receive*—accept ; have faith in. *Who in ears .....match me*—have similar bodily organs, and so hear and see exactly in the same way. *Surmise*—conjecture ; guess.

Stanza 23

The worth of a man must not be judged by his gross material activity called 'work'. Such visible and tangible activity is easily noticed by the people and rewarded. Such work stands on the same low level as the common people themselves, and so they readily notice it, catch hold of it, accept it, and at once assess its value and significance.

Vulgar mass—gross material work or activity which is visible and tangible. *They took the eye*—that were easily noticed. *Had the price*—were rewarded. *From level stand*—work which is of the same low level as the common people themselves. *Laid its hand*—accept ; recognise. *Found straitway to their mind*—the vulgar find such gross work acceptable. It pleases them.

Stanza 24

The coarse and vulgar people of the world can only measure and assess the tangible and visible achievements of a man. But these coarse and vulgar people, with their rough and ready methods of estimating the worth of a person, fail to fathom the hidden motives, impulses and instincts which cause and inspire the outward action of a man. They pass them over in their pre-occupation with their material and gross 'work'. Undeveloped instincts, doubts and uncertainties which trouble the soul, are not considered by the world as of any worth at all. No importance is attached to them in this world. But such doubts and uncertainties, the hidden motives and impulses, are the real indications of the nobility and worth of a soul. The world may not value them, but they are valued highly by God. In the eyes of God, they add to the sum total of man's achievement.

Coarse thumb and finger—rough and ready methods of evaluation.

Plumb—fathom ; to understand. *Passed*—were passed over or ignored. *In making up the main account*—in their pre-occupation with the visible and tangible. *Immature*—undeveloped, and so not expressed in action. *Weighed not*—were not valued by the world. *Swelled...... account*—increase his credit with God. God does not ignore them.

Stanza 25

Man has many ideas and ideals which cannot be transformed into actio ı. Often he has sublime and lofty notions which cannot be expressed in words, and which are forgotten as soon as they arise in the mind. Man has many noble aspirations and ambitions which, however, he fails to achieve. He fails to live up to his own ideals. Such noble ideas and ideals are ignored by the vulgar and foolish people of the world, but God judges the worth of a man by such unrealised ideas and ideals. Here the poet compares human life and destiny to a pitcher, and God to a potter. It is God who moulds human destiny, as a potter moulds a pitcher. Hence man should care for the judgment of God, and not that of man.

Hardly to be packed—which cannot be transferred into action. *Fancies*—exalted notions, ideals, and aspirations. *Broke through language*—language failed to express them. *And escaped*—were forgotten.

Stanza 26

The metaphor of the potter and his wheel used in the previous stanza is continued in this stanza. The great Rabbi asks us to note the metaphor in which God is represented as the potter, time is represented as his revolving wheel, and man's soul as passive clay. The pleasure-seekers propound the doctrine in a different way. According to them, as the world is short-lived and transient, man should not engross his attention in future life and in another world. Further, they are of opinion that as time is fast passing away and the past cannot be recalled, so he should enjoy himself in the present. But the speaker regards such philosophy as propounded by fools for the benefit of other fools.

The Potter's Wheel—the image of a potter's wheel recurs frequently in *The Bible*. In this image the *Potter* is God, the *wheel* is *time*, and the *pitcher* is *man*. *Passive*—immovable, inactive, and also helpless. *Since life fleets......sieze today*—the reference here is to the views of poets, like Omar Khayyam. Browning is critical of such foolish philosophies.

Stanza 27

Philosophers, like *Omar Khayyam*, who teach the philosophy of the present are great fools. There is no truth in what they teach. As a matter of fact, all that really exists, and is not a mere shadow, is eternal. Thus the soul and God are eternal and irrevocable. They can never parish or die. Earthly things constantly change and die

out ; the human soul and its maker, God, are alone immortal. The human soul is eternal ; it was in the past, it is in the present, and it will live on in the future as well. Time may move on, it may stop, or it may go back, but God, the potter, and the soul, the clay, which he moulds into shape, shall endure for ever. Human soul is eternal.

Past recall—irrevocable. *Earth changes*—things of the earth change and die. *Potter*—God. *Clay*—soul.

Stanza 28

God has intentionally placed our soul in the whirlpool of earthly circumstances. In this world, everything is in a flux, moving swiftly as the feet of a dancer in a dance. Man tries to arrest this rapid flux and movement of the earthly events and circumstances. But he fails to check this movement. But this must not depress or disappoint him. He must realise that the human soul is not a slave of circumstances ; it can rise above them and shape and modify them. It can master circumstance. As a master of fact, these earthly circumstances are the machinery, the device, created by God to mould the human soul into a particular shape. They are meant to try and test the human soul. When the soul has been fully tested and perfectly shaped, it is sent out into the other world to face it bravely.

Plastic circumstances—the circumstances or conditions of life, which can be shaped and moulded by the human soul. *Fair*—gladly.

Stanza 29

The metaphor of the potter and his wheel is continued in this stanza and is elaborated at great length. A potter shapes a pitcher, and carves on it different designs. On its base, he carves out joyous, youthful figures, say of Cupid, the God of love. On its uppermost part, he carves out grim horrible shapes, as skulls, and he does so not lightly and gently, but with sharper and more piercing instruments. Similarly, God makes the human soul. The days of man's youth are days of merriment and enjoyment and they may be liked to the beautifully decorated base of the pitcher. His old age, on the other hand, is full of cares and anxieties, terrible stresses and strains, and may be likened to the uppermost part of the pitcher having horrible shapes, carved with sharp, piercing instruments. However, a man must not care for this, nor must he be afraid of death. He must not mourn the loss of his youth, nor worry at the approach of old age. As shown above, old age has its own value and significance.

What though—it does not matter. *The earlier grooves*—the grooves of the potter's wheel working on the base of the pot, which is likened to the early years of man's life. *Ran*—decorated with. *The laughing loves*—the laughing figures of Cupid, the god of love. The enjoyment and pleasure of youth are meant. *No longer pause and press*—the base has been shaped and decorated and so the wheel no longer works on it, *i.e.* the period of youth is over.

Rim—the uppermost part of the pot, hence old age. *Skull things*—horrible figures as skulls etc. ; the cares and worries of old age. *Obey the sterner stress*—are formed by the use of sharper and more piercing instruments ; worries and anxieties of age which result from the trials and troubles of life.

Stanza 30

In this stanza, the Rabbi asks man not to look down towards the earth, but to look up towards God and heaven. Then his soul is likened to a cup, from which God Himself would drink. The Rabbi asks man to imagine a banquet-scene in heaven. The feast is spread on the table, the hall is brilliantly lighted, the music is being played, and foaming wine is being served. God, the Maker, Himself sits on the table, with His lips hot and flushed, ready to drink from the cup of the human soul, which He himself has fashioned. The soul of man is an exquisite cup shaped by the Divine potter on His divine wheel. In other words, human life is destined for the use of God. Man should place himself entirely in the hands of God, and must not care for earthly pleasures, or trials and tribulations. He must remember his divine origin and rise above the gross and the material.

The festal board—the dinner table, spread in the banquet hall of God. *Lamp's flash*—brilliant lights. *Trumpet's peal*—music which is usual on the occasion of a feast. *The Master's lips aglow*—God Himself, hot and thirstly, ready for a drink from the cup of human life.

Stanza 31

The Rabbi says he needs God's help, guidance and protection as much in old age as in his youth. It is God who moulds the soul of man, as a potter moulds a pitcher ; man is entirely in the hands of his Maker and entirely dependent on Him. The Rabbi knows that the end and purpose of human life is the service of God, the Maker. He was aware of this even in his youth. In youth, life is a frivolous whirl of dizzy pleasures, when tied to the ever-moving wheel of life, the human soul fully and abundantly enjoys the colours and shapes, *i.e.* the manifold beauties of nature.

While the whirl was worst—in youth, when life was a round of frivolous pleasures. *Rife*—abundant ; manifold. *With shapes and colours rife*—given to the pleasures of the earth ; 'shapes and colours', may be taken to symbolise the beauties of nature. The metaphor is not clear, and there is much ambiguity. *Bound dizzily*—bound to the wheel of time, and being whirled about on a dizzy round of pleasures.

Stanza 32

In this concluding stanza of the poem, the Rabbi places himself entirely in the hands of God. God is his Maker and He can make any use He likes of what He has created. God should amend the hidden defects from which the cup of his life suffers. He should

remove whatever defects there may be in the material of which he is made, defects which twist and distort the material beyond what the enternal potter intended. The Rabbi places himself entirely at the mercy of God ; he has full faith in His justice and mercy. He should perfect and shape the cup of his life according to His plan. Life is an organic whole. Old age judges and assesses the achievements of youth, and looks forward to the life after death. Just as old age should be welcomed as a period of quiet reflection and thought, so death is also to be welcomed as the gateway to the other world. Just as old age is the consummation of youth, so death is the consummation of this life, and so is to be welcomed.

————

19

Andrea Del Sarto

(*Called "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER"*)

(*a*) THE POEM

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart ?
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it ? tenderly ?
Oh, I'll content him,—but tomorrow, Love !
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly, the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this !
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside,
Don't count the time lost, neither ; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require :
It saves a model. So ! keep looking so—
My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds !
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there ! oh, so sweet—
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's : very dear, no less !
You smile ? why, there's my picture ready made,
There's what we painters call our harmony !
A common grayness silvers everything,—

All in a twilight, you and I alike
—You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know), but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life He makes us lead;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel He laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example—turn your head—
All that's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak:
And that cartoon, the second from the door
—It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—
Behold Madonna!—I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily too—when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past;
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
—Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter)—so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,

Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men ! at a word—
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken ; what of that ? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered ; what of that ?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care ?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for ? All is silver-gray
Placid and perfect with my art ; the worse !
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o'erlooked the world !" No doubt.
Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art—for it gives way ;
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak ; its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm ! and I could alter it :
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me, out of me ! And wherefore out ?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you !
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind !
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory ! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that ?
Live for fame, side by side with Angolo !
Rafael is waiting : up to God, all three !"
I might have done it for you. So it seems :
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self ;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you ?

What wife had Rafael, or has Angolo ?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not ;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive :
Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside ;
But they speak sometimes ; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak ! That Francis, that first time
And that long festal year at Fontaianebleau !
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward !
A good time, was it not, my kingly days ?
And had you not grown restless......but I know—
'Tis done and past ; 'twas right, my instinct said ;
Too live the life grew, golden and not gray,
And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way ?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was—to reach and stay there ; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost ?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine !
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that ;
The Roman's is the better when you pray,
But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence ; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Angolo, his very self,
To Rafael......I have known it all these years......

(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
Who, were he set to plan and execute
As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours !"
To Rafael's—And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare......yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go !
Ay, but the soul ! he's Rafael ! rub it out !
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he ? why, who but Michael Angolo ?
Do you forget already words like those ?)
If really there was such a chance, so lost,—
Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And your smile indeed !
This hour has been an hour ! Another smile ?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend ?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now ; there's a star ;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me : oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with !
Let us but love each other. Must you go ?
That Cousin here again ? he waits outside ?
Must see you—you, and not with me ? Those loans ?
More gaming debts to pay ? you smiled for that ?
Well, let smiles buy me ! have you more to spend ?
While hand and eye and somthing of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth ?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The gray remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time ! I want you at my side
To hear them—that is, Michel Angolo—
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you ? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,

Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs ; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff !
Love, does that please you ? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin ! What does he to please you more ?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it ?
The very wrong to Francis !—it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own ? you see
How one gets rich ! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died :
And I have labored somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try !
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have ?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Angolo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife,
While I have mine ! So—still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whitsle ! Go, my Love.

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Date of Publication : The Career of Andrea

Andrea Del Sarto was first published in the volume of Browning's poems entitled *Men and Women*, 1855. Andrea Del Sarto (the son of a tailor) was a great painter of the Florentine School. Browning's poem was inspired by a picture of Andrea and his wife, Lucrezia, hung in the art-gallery of Pitti Palace, Florence. For the facts of the painter's life, Browning is indebted to his biography from the pen of his pupil, *Vasari*. According to Vasari's account, the great painter, "faultless but soul-less' was born in 1486, in Florence. Early in life he fell in love with Lucrezia, the wife of a hatter. She was a woman of rare beauty, but frivolous and faithless. On the death of her first husband, Andrea married her, and continued to love her even-though he knew that she was unfaithful to him. For her sake, he played false to the king of France, Francis I, embezzled his money, as well as neglected

his parents and allowed them to die of starvation. This faithless women ultimately deserted him. Andrea died of plague in 1530, at the age of forty-three. Lucrezia married a third time after his death. Such are the bare facts of Andrea's life, but as **Berdoe** tells us, the poet *has mixed these facts, "with his thoughts and has transfigured them, so that the sad, and infinitely pathetic soul, in its stunted growth and wasted form, lives before us in Browning's lines."*

As a Dramatic Monologue : Its Distinctive Features

Andrea Del Sarto is one of the greatest of the dramatic monolongues of Browning. It differs from his other monologues in a number of important respects. Unlike the other monologues, it does not grow out of a critical situation ; rather, it presents a slice from the great painter's life. While the other monologues of the poet deal with the exalting and ennobling influence of love, this monologue tells us of the degrading and disintegrading effect of love on the great painter's soul. The painter is shown in a reflective mood, and as he muses over his failure in art, his very soul is laid bare before the readers. His thoughts range over the past and the present, and in this way is revealed the complete tragedy of a soul. The setting is the painter's studio in Florence and, "the silver grey", of an autumn evening. Lucrezia is both the interlocutor and the listener, and in the background stand such minor figures as, "the cousin", and the French king and the French nobles. It is a remarkable piece of character-study, and the characters both of Andrea and Lucrezia have been well brought out. Just as, *"'Abt Vogler' is his greatest music-poem, so this is his greatest art-poem, and both are unique"*. **Berdoe)**

The Character of Andrea : His Failure

The Monologue tells the pathetic tale of the moral and artistic failure of a talented painter, "faultless", in execution, but devoid of any lofty purpose in his life or art. The use of the word "faultless" is ironical, for no art can be called perfect, which does not have spiritual beauty. The true artist is he who has lofty ideals to inspire him, and whose execution is necessarily imperfect, as it can never attain the height of his ideal. The artist, whose execution is perfect and faultless, but lacks "soul", must needs be an inferior artist : he might be a great craftsman, but he can never be ranked with supreme artists like Raphael or Michael Angelo who, no doubt, committed technical mistakes in their pictures, but whose ideal was always pitched high, and whose art is expressive of, "the divine discontent", within their souls. Andrea aims low, achieves his ideal, and knows that the grayness of complacency has fallen over his art and so sighs :

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's Heaven for ?

The Character of Lucrezia : The Cause of His Failure

The tragedy of Andrea is that he has no "loftiness of ideal,"

though in point of workmanship he is simply faultless. "This innate defect in Andrea, Browning further represents as increased by the influence of his wife, Lucrezia, whom he pictures as not merely unprincipled, but heartless and shallow, quite incapable of appreciating any, but the lowest and most material aspects of life." Andrea is infatuated with her, and in order to please her, he embezzles the money given to him by his patron, King Francis I of France, for buying pictures. He is guilty of a far worse crime in neglecting his aged father and mother and leaving them to die of starvation. So great is his infatuation with his wife, that he dotes upon her even though he knows that she does not love him, and is unfaithful to him.

The Setting

Andrea paints pictures for her sake alone. She works as the "model" for his pictures, and he gives the money so earned to her so that she might discharge the debts of her lover. It is she whom Andrea adresses in the monologue. She has been urging him to paint a picture for a rich friend of one of her lovers. Andrea asks her to sit down by his side for half-an hour that evening as married people do, and next morning he would satisfy the friend of her lover. The place is his studio in the house built with king Francis' money. On the walls hang pictures done by Andrea, as well as a copy of a work of Raphael, which exhibits that loftiness of purpose which Andrea lacks, as well as that defective execution which marks the works of the great Renaissance painter. His Madonna (the portrait of Virgin Mary) serves as a contrast to bring out Andrea's limitation as well as his technical perfection.

The Melancholy Atmosphere

It is an autumn evening, the darkness is gathering ; a sombre melancholy, in keeping with Andrea's mood, hangs over everything. "He is conscious of his degradation, oppressed with the sense of failure, yet lacks strength of character to break his bonds. He half-excuses his feebleness as submission to God's will. His heart is yearning for sympathy and companionship, and for a stimulus to higher impulses not yet dead within him ; but this his wife is equally indisposed and unable to give. She is heartless and indifferent, the restless element in the scene, which she closes by hastening away to keep an appointment with a supposed cousin, really a lover."

(W. J. Alexander)

Critical Summary : "Soul Dissection"

As Lucrezia stands in urgent need of money—she has to pay off the debts of her lover waiting outside—she agrees to Andrea's request to sit by him for sometime. Then Andrea takes hold of her hand, addresses her in the most loving words, and pours out his soul into her unsympathetic ears. He asks her not to be angry with him but just to sit down and look at him. He will certainly paint the picture she wants him to paint and give her the money to hand it

over to her friend that he might discharge his debts. But just then he is tired. If she placed her hand in his, and sat there with him for half an hour looking at the city of Fiesole that quiet evening, it was certain that tomorrow he would be relaxed and in a proper mood to paint that picture. Sitting with him thus, her hand softly enclosed in his, she can inspire him and also work as a model for each of the five pictures they require. As Lucrezia looks towards him, he asks her to keep looking like that. He praises her beauty and calls her, ' my serpentining beauty". Her ears are so perfect that their beauty is spoiled even by the pearl that hangs therein. Her face is beautiful like the Moon, and as with the Moon, everyone is fascinated by her also. All love her, though she loves no one. Lucrezia is pleased at this compliment and smiles. Andrea asks her to look at that yonder portrait representing her in her first pride in him, and Andrea himself as a young man full of hopes, but now toned down to an autumnal sober grey as that of Fiesole at the time. It is all as God wishes; we seem free, but are really fettered.

With some bitterness in his voice, Andrea then tells her that he can execute perfectly what he wishes, so great is his technical skill. She herself heard the Legate and certain Frenchmen praising him a day ago. Others strive to do and often fail to do what he can execute without an effort. And yet, "less is more"; for all their technical imperfections, painters like Rafael and Angelo have a divine inspiration which is denied to him, and he remains only a low-pulsed craftsman These men do not have the art which is technically perfect, but they can occasionally rise to heaven, while, he, whose paintings are nearer perfection than theirs, is always rooted to the ground. He does not have as such fire or enthusiasm as they. What does it matter, if in Rafael's Madonna (the portrait of Virgin Mary) there is a mistake in outline or colour? His work has spiritual beauty, the fire of inspiration, while his own work is all silver-grey; there is nothing of Heaven in it. The picture of Rafael, which kings and popes have applauded, is by no means perfect in execution. He has put the arm wrongly, but "the soul is right". He can better the drawing of the arm, but he cannot have his insight and inspiration. If Lucrezia had loved him and inspired him, he would have attained to Rafael's heights. If, with her perfect beauty and low, ensnaring voice, she had brought an equally noble mind, and urged him to paint, not for gain, but for, "God and the Glory," he would have ranked with painters like Rafael and Michael Angelo. But it is no use to regret for what is past and gone. He must not blame her. "All is as God overrules." Besides, Rafael and Angelo had no wives, and yet they could put soul into their works. This shows that true inspiration comes from within.

God compensates and punishes adequately everyone at the end, and it is better that he has not received his reward in this world. God will reward him in the life to come. He can now look forward to heaven with hope and confidence. *Thus Andrea becomes the spokesman of Browning's philosophy.* Continuing in a mode of reflection, he says that he avoids meeting the French lords, because he embez-

zled the money of the French king. The time he passed in France was a glorious time. King Francis encouraged him. All that year at Fontainebleau, he was so inspired by his humanity and generosity, and the sweet memory of his wife, that he could sometimes leave the ground and rise to Heaven. But that life palled on him, it was golden and not grey, and Lucrezia, too, grew restless and when she called him away from France, he came at her call. That was her real triumph ; he could get her love even though he did not get recognition as a painter. Therefore, he does not regret his failure. He would very much like to paint a portrait of Virgin Mary with his wife serving as his model. People will compare Rafael's painting to his and would prefer him (Rafael), but they will excuse him, when they will come to know that the Virgin in his picture was painted after his own wife, while Rafael had no such wife as his model. They would realise that it was his wife who dragged him down.

In order to impress her further with his skill, he tells her that once Angelo said to Rafael, while the latter was in the prime of his powers, that there was, "a sorry little scrub", in Florence who, if encouraged and inspired by Popes and Kings in the way Rafael was, would prove a formidable rival to him. The reference, of course, was to Andrea himself. He can improve easily that arm of the Madonna of Rafael, but there is not that soul in him that there was in Rafael. He had a chance to become another Rafael during his stay with the French king. But he has lost that chance. But what matters to him is whether Lucrezia is pleased or not, for it was for her that he had thrown away the golden chance of his life. All he wanted was only such an hour as this, such a smile as hers at that moment. Refreshed in this way, he could paint better, get more money and then give it all to her.

Andrea wants to keep her to himself for sometime more, but she is impatient to go to her cousin waiting outside for a private meeting with her. Perhaps, she wants money to pay his debts, and perhaps she wants to take that money from him with her smiles. By all means, he is ready to give her the money she needs in exchange for her smiles. Only, he wants her to sit with him for the remainder of that evening, while he muses how well he would paint, if he were again called to France. He would paint a Madonna, but not with Lucrezia as his model. Then he should be properly judged in his art. Tomorrow, the portrait her friends needs will be ready for sale to bring him money. She can then pay off the debts of her lover, and also have the money she requires for herself. He has been trying so much to please her, but with no success. What more does that cousin do, so that she is more pleased with him ?

The past comes to Andrea's memory as it would to an old man's. He realises full well that he sinned in embezzling the money of Francis. He was also guilty of letting his parents die of want, but he justifies his conduct saying that, that was their lot ; he, too, has suffered from lack of means. Everyone must bear his lot in thi world. So great is his degradation, and so great is his infatuation, that he tells Lucrezia that it is sufficient compensation for him that

she has spared sometime for him that evening. That is all he wants on earth. In Heaven, he might get a chance and paint again with great artists, like Leonardo, Michael Angelo and Rafael. But he would still have her as his wife (they three being wifeless) and so he would still be dragged down by her. Even then, he would prefer to have her there also. So great is his love for her.

At this moment, the cousin (the lover) of Lucrezia whistles again Perhaps his whistling is more urgent than before, and so Andrea permits her to leave him and go to him.

Browning's Philosophy : Note of Optimism

The remarkable monologue is not only an admirable piece of character-study, it also embodies Browning's philosophy. It brings out the poet's optimism, his faith in God, and in the immortality of the human soul. It also throws light on his theory of art. Artistic greatness is not merely a matter of technical perfection ; it must also be expressive of the urge within the artist's soul for the ideal and the unattainable. A great artist must pitch his ideals high, and the ideal must always elude his grasp. Attainment and satisfaction result in complacency ; then there is no longer that "ceaseless striving" which is the secret of all great art, with the result that a placid greyness overtakes the works of such artists. This was the tragedy of Andrea. He achieved technical perfection and so lacked the inner urge for greater achievement. His art lacked, 'soul', the fire and glow of passion and inspiration, and so must be ranked inferior to the art of Rafael and Angelo, painters who were far his inferiors in technical excellence.

Style : Sy:

The Monologue is characterised by lucidity and clarity of style. It is entirely free from the usual faults of Browning. There is no obscurity. Specially noteworthy is the symbolic use of colour words. Thus the word, "grey", 'silvery grey', etc., have been used to symbolise the greyness of Andrea's art and life. It has neither the 'glow', and, 'gold', the brilliance of inspiration and passion, nor does it have the darkness of failure and complete despair. It lies in between ; its colour is, 'gray', or the dull shades of twilight. These colour words symbolise the spiritual enervation and exhaustion of Andrea.

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Lines 1-10. But do not let us......but towards love.

Andrea Del Sarto, the faultless painter, is infatuated with his beautiful wife, Lucrezia, who, however, does not love him and is unfaithful to him. One evening in the year 1525, the Florentine painter sits by the side of his wife in his studio. She has quarrelled with him for the last twelve years, ever since they were married, but now Andrea requests her not to quarrel with him, at least, for one evening. She must have

patience with him for a short while. He will do whatever she wishes him to do. At his request, she sits by him and turns her face towards him. But does her face also bring her heart towards him? Andrea does not hope for any such good fortune. He knows that she looks towards him only in compliance with his request, but her heart is with her lover waiting outside. If only she would sit with him that evening and not quarrel with him, he would paint the picture which her friend's (lover's) friend wants him to paint. He will paint according to his directions, at the time fixed by him, and accept the payment he likes to make for the painting. Whatever money he gets, he will shut it in her small hand, *i.e.* he will give the money to her and she may spend it in the way she likes. Andrea is sure that she will give her hand into his, at least to take the money. Will she give her hand into his with love? As Lucrezia looks towards him, probably with some displeasure, the painter hastens to assure her that he would definitely satisfy her lover's friend, even if she is not more loving to him. But he would paint for him tomorrow. That evening he would prefer to enjoy her company.

Bear with me—have patience with me; bear my weaknesses, and do not quarrel with me.

Friend's friend—A wealthy friend of the lover of his wife wants him to paint a picture for him. The lover is under debt and he hopes to get from Lucrezia the money which the painter will earn by painting the picture.

Treat his own............own way—the painter promises to paint according to the instructions of the friend of her lover. Can there be greater infatuation and slavery? This is the extent of his degradation.

Lines 11-20. I often am much......glad for this.

Andrea tells his wife that he is too tired that evening to paint the picture which her friend's friend wants him to paint. He will definitely do so tomorrow. Often, he is much more tired than she imagines. That evening he is even more tired than usual. He requests to let him sit by her side for half an hour with her hands in his. He would prefer to sit by the window and look out through it at the city of Fiesole at a distance of three miles. Married people often sit together in this way, and Andrea also yearns for the calm felicity of conjugal love and married life. He has never been able to enjoy this calm and peace of married life. They have always quarrelled. But if he enjoys it for that one evening, it is possible he will feel relaxed and refreshed, and, therefore, he will be able to work with greater will and enthusiasm next morning. Let them try it, and he is sure she would be glad of it, for the picture he would paint next morning for her friend's friend would be more artistic and beautiful, and so she would get more money for it.

It seems, as if......forgive now—Note the timid, apologetic way in which Andrea talks to his wife. He is so much afraid of her. *Forth*—out of the window. *Fiesole*—a town in the vicinity of Florence

and visible from the window of Andrea's studio. *You shall be glad of this*—because she will get more money.

Lines 21-34. Your soft hand......call our harmony.

Andrea requests his wife, Lucrezia, to sit with him for just half an hour with her hand in his. Her soft and delicate hand curls in his hand as a woman curls on the bare breast of the man she loves. Her hand thus is likened to a soft and delicate woman and his own to the breast of the man she loves. Andrea further asks her not to consider the time she passes in his company as wasted. If she keeps looking at him as she is looking at the moment, she would form an excellent model for the five pictures he has to paint, and in this way much money would be saved. Infatuated with her, he says that she looks most beautiful, graceful and fascinating like a serpent. The phrase, "serpenting beauty", is an inspiration of genius, for it brings out the graceful beauty of her delicate curves, as well as her sinister influence on her husband. She must remain sitting there, coiled in that graceful way. Her ears are so perfect, so beautiful, that it appears to him an act of cruelty that they should have been punctured even to put those beautiful ear-rings in. Her beauty is so sweet and perfect that he cannot describe it in words. Her face is as beautiful and fascinating as the Moon. And like the Moon, it is looked on by everybody and called his, and like the Moon it, too, smiles on everybody. But just as the Moon belongs to no one, in the same way she, too, belongs to no one, not even to her husband. Not only is she his Moon, but also of everybody else. Even then he loves her dearly. At this compliment, Lucrezia smiles. Andrea in raptures exclaims that at the moment she looks a perfect model for a picture. Her smile would inspire him in the picture he paints next. It is in such moments of inspiration that painters can paint technically perfect pictures, pictures in which the various parts are harmoniously related to each other. It is in this way that perfectly beautiful works of art are created.

Your soft hand is a woman in itself—her soft hand, in all its delicacy and charm, is likened to a woman curling against the bare breast of the man she loves. His own hand thus becomes the bared breast of the man. The beautiful metaphor is an inspiration of genius.

Save the model—save the money which must be paid to a model, if they engage one.

Serpentining beauty—it suggests the graceful curves of her body, as well as her sinister, evil influence over the soul of the painter.

Rounds on rounds—go on curling in that graceful manner.

Our harmony—harmony results from the proportionate combination of the parts to the whole. Such harmonious combination leads to aesthetic beauty.

Lines 35-49. A common greyness......a twilight piece.

In these lines, Andrea describes the autumn 'greyness', and, 'twilight' which has overtaken his life and his art. 'Grey' is a colour between white and black and, 'Autumn' is a season between summer and winter. A 'silvery' colour is a greyish white colour. Autumn greyness has overtaken his life as well as his art. His life is neither rapturously happy nor unbearbly gloomy. Similarly, his art also has neither the bright colours of happiness nor the black of absolute despair. It has the dull colours of twilight suggestive neither of the brightness of day nor the darkness of night. The picture which he will now paint, and which will represent them sitting together, will have a silvery grey colour all over. It would be colourless and dull like his life. It would not have the bright colours of the morning and evening, but there would be toning down of colours as at the time of dusk. There was a time when she was proud of him, but the dullness of twilight has fallen on it, too, and her pride in him is no more now. As far as he is concerned, autumn has fallen on everything about his life and his art. His youth, his art, his hopes, have all been subdued to the dull, sober colours of the city of Fiesole at the time of twilight, seen at a distance through the window. Inspiration is necessary for great art ; as he has failed to receive that inspiration (because his wife did not return his love) he can paint pictures which are only technically perfect, but which are soulless and so fail to rise to the heights of great art. His art is a twilight art having neither the ecstatic brightness of great art nor the unrelieved gloom of failure and despair.

In order further to explain his point, the painter calls the attention of his wife to the twilight landscape visible through the window. There is the chapel from whose tower comes the sound of the ringing of a bell. Within its walls, crowded close together, are to be seen a number of trees. They can even see the last monk returning to the convent from the garden. It is autumn season and so the days are growing shorter and shorter. Just as the uniform autumn greyness colours everything in the landscape outside, in the same way his life and his art have all become uniformly grey. His life has lost the brightness of happiness, and his art the brightness of ecstasy. Both his life and his art are harmoniously grey. His life, his work, all that he has done since his youth, is like a well-planned landscape having the same, dull, autumn 'grey' colour. It is like a landscape painted in the dull half-tints of twilight. In this way, there is perfect harmony between his soul and his work. His soul lacks inspiration ; his work glory and splendour.

Silvers—colours with a grey, silvery colour. *Your first pride in me*—when they had first met, Lucrezia was proud of him, but now even that pride is gone. She never loved him, but now she is not even proud of him. *At every point*—in every respect. *Toned down*—subdued. *Huddled*—crowded. *To fall into a shape*—the whole landscape seems to be a well-planned whole, having the same grey colour all over.

Line 49-66. Love, we are in God's hands......used to say in France.

Having told Lucrezia of the 'greyness' of his own art and life, Andrea indulges in some reflection on human life. He takes refuge in a weak, fatalistic philosophy. Man seems to be free, but in reality he has no freedom of will. He is helpless like a prisoner fettered in chains. Man is entirely in the hands of God ; he cannot do anything himself. The kind of life they—Andrea and Lucrezia—have been leading, has been imposed upon them by God. He holds God responsible for all their suffering and unhappiness. They cannot do nothing but obey the will of God and act accordingly. They must be resigned to their lot.

He then changes the subject and invites Lucrezia to look attentively at the various pictures in the room, *i. e.* his studio where they are sitting. Probably, Lucrezia has been listening to him with such scant attention that Andrea asks her to be more attentive to him, and look in the direction he points out. He asks her to turn her head and look at the pictures hanging behind them at the walls of the studio. (Or does he ask her to consider their past life as well ?). He complains that she does not understand his art, nor has she ever tried to understand it. But, at least, she must have heard people speaking of his art, and praising it. From their speeches, she must have formed an idea of his greatness as an artist. He then draws her attention to the picture, second from the door. It is a perfect painting, one which should serve as a model for others. Every painter should paint like this and in no other way. Then there is the famous portrait of the Virgin Mary. He can make bold to assert that the picture is technically faultless, and that none can find fault with it. He can paint such a portrait quite easily, as if it were a mere sketch done by the pencil. What he knows and what he feels deeply, he can express easily and faultlessly. It will not be a mere boast to say that his technical skill is so great that he can paint perfectly. As far as technical perfection is concerned, he is second to none. Lucrezia can herself form an idea of his technical perfection as a painter from the praises of the high official of the church who visited them last week. And equally high were the prises of the people when he was in France. His technical perfection has always been admired.

Fettered fast we are—helpless, and lacking in freedom of action, like a prisoner in chains.

Let it lie—God's will be done, so let us be resigned to our lot.

The Chamber—The studio where they are sitting. *All that is behind us*—all the pictures hanging at their back.

When people speak—when people praise me for my greatness as a painter.

Cartoon—a humorous or satiric portrait. *It is the thing*—the perfect painting, one which should serve as a model for others.

Madonna—a picture of Virgin Mary. It was a Renaissance

fashion to paint pictures of Virgin Mary. The Madonna of Rafael, the Italian painter, was the best of its kind. Andrea also has an excellent Madonna to his credit. Probably, it is to this Madonna that he now invites the attention of Lucrezia.

Legate—a highly-placed dignitary of the Church. *In France*—Andrea was invited by the King of France to paint for the decoration of his palace.

Lines 67-87. At any rate it is easy......but I sit here.

Painting now is quite easy for him. He works effortlessly and can still achieve technical perfection. There is no need for him any longer to draw rough sketches, or to study his models carefully. The time when he had to labour hard is now long past. His technical skill is such that he can paint without effort and achieve a perfection which others dream of achieving all their lives, and still fail, despite all their hard labour and striving. They take pains, but still fall far short of perfection. Within their own city of Florence, there are many such painters who fail to achieve technical excellence, despite all the pains they take. He can name at least twenty such artists. They strive and labour hard to paint even such a petty piece as she spoiled by carelessly letting her dress to brush against the undried paints on it. That others fail, despite all their striving, is not his opinion alone, it is also the opinion of some one whom she knows and who can tell her, but it is not anything important. The important point is that though other painters are far inferior to him in technical skill, their works are better and greater in another way. Their works are a judgment on his own ; by comparison with them his own inferiority is brought out. Their work may be technically imperfect, but still it is higher to his own as their soul is lighted by divine inspiration, but he himself lacks such inspiration. Their brains may be confused, troubled, and dull, they may lack his own skill, but still they are greater than he, for their art is an expression of their divine visions. No doubt, he is a perfect craftsman, one who can paint without any faltering and hesitation, but he lacks deep emotions and high aspirations of the true artist. In this, he is inferior to others who are much lesser craftsman. Their technical limitations pull their work downwards, but then they have divine visions, as if they have entered the very gates of heaven, enterance to which is always denied to him. They do enter heaven, they do have divine visions ; it is another matter that they cannot express their visions perfectly. They have their moments of ecstasy and rapture. His art, no doubt, is nearer heaven, *i.e.* has far greater technical perfection, but his soul is always in the studio. It never rises upto heaven, he lacks inspiration and enthusiasm. This is his inferiority. This is the tragedy of his life.

Lines 88-103. The sudden blood of these men......overlooked the world, no doubt,

Continuing to compare himself with other painters, Andrea tells his wife that these other painters have a soul which is stirred

by deep passions and emotions. At a word of praise or blame, they are deeply moved. On the other hand, he has a passionless soul which is not at all affected by the praise or blame of others. He paints for his own satisfaction and not that of others, and he knows fully well what he is doing. Suppose somebody comes to his studio, points to his painting of Morello, the well-known mountain peak near Forence, and begins criticising it for its wrong outline, and mistaken colours. He will not be moved at all by his criticism. In the same way, if some one praises the painting for its order and colour, he would not be moved at all. Both praise and blame leave him cold and unmoved. Just as the mountain is not moved by what others say of it, so also he remains unmoved by the views of others. In his technical skill, he is great like a mountain, but he is also soul-less and passionless like it. His art has achieved perfection and that is his tragedy. A man's ideals should always elude his grasp. They should always remain beyond his reach. If he succeeds in realising his aspirations, he would have nothing left to hope for from heaven. Life in heaven will have no meaning for him. Moreover, perfection of achievement results in complacency, and, "divine discontant", is essential for advancement or progress. "The silver-grey," of autumn has overtaken his art. It is technically perfect, but it fails to rise to the heights of great art. It lacks the fire of emotion and inspiration. It does not burn with artistic frenzy. It is a static, unprogressive art, expressing his own content at his technical perfection. He aimed low, achieved what he aimed at, and so his art suffers from his complacency. His technical skill has been so much the worse for his art. He is fully aware of the limitations of his own art, and also knows how those limitations can be made good. But it is useless to regret and sigh for what is not. It is now useless to say that had he the right type of wife, the wife who would have loved him, inspired him, and urged him on, he would have achieved great heights in his art. He, and his wife along with him, would have towered head and shoulders above other artists. But all such regrets avail nothing.

The sudden blood—passions which are inflamed quite easily. *Morello*—a mountain-peak near Florence. *A man's reach......heaven for*—the lines are a concentrated expression of Browning's philosophy. A man should pitch his ideals high, so that his actual achievement may fall short of his ideals and he may look forward to heaven with hope of perfect achievement there. *Placid*—static, unprogressive.

Had I been two......overlooked the world—Andrea regrets that he does not have a loving wife who could have inspired him and urged him on by her love and interest in his work. Then he would have surely risen to the heights of true art.

Lines 104-117. Yonder is a work now......out of me ! out of me !

Andrea now draws the attention of Lucrezia to a painting done by the famous Renaissance artist, Rafael, who was born at Urbino and who died young, only five years ago. The picture is not the orininal work of Rafael but a copy of it sent to him by his pupil

George Vasari. Andrea understands how the greatness of that picture was achieved. Rafael poured his whole soul into his pictures so that even Popes and Kings may see it and admire it. He was an inspired artist, he aimed high, his soul reached heaven itself, and he and his art were both inspired by his divine visions. He poured his soul into his art, and then refilled it by divine visions. He had vision and inspiration, but he did not have the technical skill to express that visions with perfection. The picture is technically wrong. For example, the arm is wrongly put and then there is another fault in its outline. But it is only the body of the picture which is defective; its soul is perfectly right. There is nothing worng with it. Even a child can understand the meaning of the picture, for the vision of Rafael was clear and vivid. He can easily correct the technical faults of Rafael, but the activity of Rafael's soul, his vision and inspiration, his emotional range, etc., are beyond his reach. That is his tragedy.

Who died five years ago—this fixes the date of the Monologue. Since Rafael died in 1520, Andrea must be supposed to have uttered these lines in 1515.

So replenish him—bless him with such vision and inspiration. *Above and through his art*—which he may try to express in his art, and which may always remain beyond his reach as an artist. In short, he had high and noble ideas and visions which eluded his grasp, and hence the greatness of his art.

The play—the spiritual activity; the play of emotions. *The stretch*—the range of emotions; the width of vision.

Lines 118-133. Had you enjoined them......All is as God Overrules.

Andrea now proceeds to explain to Lucrezia the cause of this failure. It is she who is responsible for his failure. Had she wanted she could have inspired him, and then his art would not have lacked emotion and passion. Inspired by her, he could easily have put soul into his art, and then they together would have risen to the heights which Rafael attained. So great is Andrew's infatuation with his wife, he is so much afraid of offending her, that noticing a look of displeasure, a frown, on her face, he at once apologises. She gave him all that he had asked for, and much more several times over than he deserved. The real fault lies with him, for had he asked for more, perhaps, she would have given more. Still he has a pathetic consciousness of what his wife's incompatibility has cost him in fame and recognition. There is, no doubt, that she is perfectly beautiful. She has a beautiful face, beautiful eyes, and a beautiful mouth. She has sweet melodious voice, a serpenting beauty, which ensnares him, and holds him captive as birds are held captive by the melody of the fowler's (bird-catcher's) pipe. There can be no doubt that physically she is perfect, but she lacks beauty of spirit. Her soul is not great enough to inspire him, as other women inspire their husbands. Had she with her beautiful mouth urged him and inspired him to work for

the service of God and to win name and fame, and to consider the present as nothing in comparison with the glory of the future, the result would have been quite different. But she did not do so. She looked at his art purely from the utilitarian point of view. She cared for it merely as a source of earning money. Had she urged him to paint not for money, but for future name and fame, and to rise to the same heights as Michael Angelo and Rafael attained, and that all three of them should equally enjoy fame, glory and heavenly bliss, certainly he would have equalled their artistic achievements. It seems quite possible that inspired by her he would have done so. But she failed him and that is the tragedy of his life. But one should not complain, for they are all in the hands of God. Everything happens as he ordains. Man is not a free agent. He is merely a instrument of His will.

Enjoined—incited, urged, inspired. *Them*—the play of emotions, the vision, and the insight which Rafael had. *Fowler's*—of the bird-catcher. *Mind*—spiritual beauty ; beauty of spirit. *Urged*—incited, pressed ; emphasised.

The present by......What is that. The present is nothing in comparison with the future. *Angelo*—Michael Angelo, the most vigorous and forceful of the great painters of Renaissance Italy.

Lines 134-141. Besides, incentive......Compensates, punishes.

For a brief while, Andrea complains that his failure as an artist has been caused by the incompatibility of his wife. She cared only for money, and looked at his art from a purely utilitarian point of view. But the very next moment he realises his mistake, and the truth dawns upon him. True inspiration comes ftom within the soul of the artist himself ; it is the artist's own inner urge which makes him sacrifice present gain for future fame and glory. No amount of external stimulus can be of much good in this respect. So, he was wrong in blaming his wife, and holding her responsible for his own failure. Rafael and Angelo could achieve perfection, they could put soul into their work, but they had no wives to inspire them and urge them on. Such is human nature that those who have the capacity to do great things, do not have the will to do so, and these who have the will, lack the capacity. The combination of will and ability is rare, with the result that they are all half men, having either the will, the desire, or the power and capacity. With their limited resources and incomplete powers, they, the half men, struggle on some how or the other to achieve their ends. In the end, God judges the actions of man and rewards and punishes accordingly as man has performed his duty or has failed in this respect. Everything is in the hands of God, and it is useless to complain or worry.

Incentive—inspiration, urge. *The rest avail not*—External sources of inspiration are of no avail.

Lines 142-164. It is safer for me......to crown the issue with a last reward.

Andrea, like the poet himself, derives hope from the fact

that his merit has not been recognised in this world, and he has not been properly rewarded. If the judgment of God is exactly in proportion to one's merits, then it means that he should surely be rewarded in heaven, and duly compensated for his lack of recognition in this world. Here he has been somewhat underrated, and has been poor, and he has been despised by the people over a long period of time. To tell the truth, he does not go out of his house in day time, for he is afraid of meeting any of the French lords, who might be on a visit to Florence. Often when they come across him in the streets, they avert their faces in disgust, look to the other side and ignore him. This show of contempt is preferable to the disappearing comments they sometimes make as they pass by him. And, says, Andrea, they are justified in their comments, and he must bear their insulting remarks. The fault lies with him. He embezzled the money which the French King had given him to purchase some portraits for him in Florence. To please his wife, he built a palatial residence for her with that money. The French King, Francis I, invited him to France to decorate his palace, Fontainebleau, with his pictures. The one year he passed there was the happiest period of his life, the period when he enjoyed the maximum of success, fame, and happiness. During these days, he was inspired, like Rafael himself. Often it seemed to him that his inspiration was lifting him up from the earth. He felt the same exaltation for a brief while, as Rafael felt everyday. The kind and sympathetic looks of the great monarch inspired him, and he felt glorified for the time being. Andrea then recalls the various gestures and movements of the king. He remembers how the king would bend over him as he painted, with one finger in his beard or on his lips, and his arms round his neck and shoulders. As the king watched him painting, he could hear the jingle of his golden chain quite close to his ear, and could also feel his breath on his face. He was proud of the favours shown to him by the King. They were happy days indeed. All the courtiers, would stand round the king, looking at his work with the same regard and consideration as the King himself. The French nobles had such frank eyes and they looked at his work with such abundant enthusiasm, that he was encouraged and inspired and kept steadily working, without feeling any fatigue at all. Andrea then adds that he was inspired not hy the French people alone, but also by the memory of the sweet face of his wife waiting for him at home. He hoped that on his return home he would get his highest reward, the reward he valued most of all, in the form of the love and appreciation of his wife. It was this hope, more than the enthusiasm and appreciation of the French king, which kept him steadily at his work.

If the award be strict—strictly in proportion to the merits of the person concerned. *Something*—somewhat. *Underrated*—underestimated ; not properly rewarded. *Speak*—make insulting comments. *Well they may speak*—They are fully justified in criticising him. *Festal year*—year of happiness. *Fontainebleau*—the name of the palace of the Freanch King, Francis I. He invited Andrea to paint for his palace. He was kind and generous to him, but Andrea returned his generosity by embezzeling the money which he gave to him to

make certain purchases for him in Florence. He did so to please his wife.

Leave the earth—felt inspired and spiritually exalted. *Golden looks*—kind, gracious looks. *Put on the glory*—felt exalted. *The mouths' good marks......the smile*—the lips, the boundary of the mouth. *Seeing with his eyes*—admiring me like him. *Such fire of souls profuse*—such abundant enthusiasm. *Plying*—working. *By those hearts*—encouraged by the admiration of the King and his courtiers. *The issue*—the result of my labour, my work.

Lines 165-174. A good time, was it not......Whats' lost.

Andrea tells his wife that the days which he passed in France, in the company of King Francis I, were the happiest days of his life. That was the royal period of his life. With some bitterness in his tone, he says that if she, Lucrezia, had not grown impatient at his long stay in France and called him back home, he would have stayed there for sometime, more, and achieved fame and recognition like Rafael and Angelo. Perhaps, at this, Lucrezia is displeased and he notices a frown on her face. So he at once remarks that what is past is dead and gone, and there is no use to regret it. As a matter of fact, at that time he himself felt that it would be right and proper for him to return home. He instinctively felt that it would be better for him to go home to his beloved wife. Life in France was growing too full of glory and splendour to suit him. In order to explain his point, he compares himself to a bat. A bat is weak-eyed, and his eyes are blinded by the dazzling light of the sun. It feels comfortable only within the four walls of a farmhouse which forms its world. In the same way, he could not bear the glory, the splendour of the life, at the French court. This life did not suit him, and it was right and proper that it ended. She called him and he returned to her. He wanted to gain success, fame and recognition in his art, so that he may gain her love and stay for ever in her heart. Since he has been able to gain her love even without any artistic triumph, he is in no way a loser. He has, therefore, lost nothing in returning home at her call.

Kingly days—days passed in the company of a king, or days in which he enjoyed glory and splendour worthy of a king. *Restless*—impatient. *Too live*—life in France grew too intense for Andrea to bear it. *Golden and not grey*—the life in France acquired a golden colour, while the colour which suits him is subdued grey. *Golden*—full of glory and splendour. *Grange*—a farmhouse. *The triumph was*—he wanted success in his art so that he may gain her love and stay in her heart.

Lines 175-193. Let my hands frame...into that brow of yours.

Andrea tells Lucrezia that he would like to paint her beautiful face with her golden hair, as sweet and charming as she looked at the moment. She was his, and this was all he wanted ; her love was a sufficient compensation for him for his failure as an artist (The line is ironical, for we know that she was not his. Even at that moment she

was impatient to go to her lover, waiting outside). People will compare the picture of Virgin Mary painted by him, and the one painted by Rafael. They would say that the portrait of Rafael is more awe inspiring, and therefore, better for use for devotional purposes. It has a spiritual beauty which the portrait of the other painter, Andrea lacks. But then they would say, he painted his Madonna. with his wife as his model, and so it is excusable if it does not have the spiritual beauty of Rafael's portrait. It was his wife who dragged him down.

He then proceeds to compare his own work and that of Rafael in the presence of his wife, and thus bring out his comparative superiority. The comparison reveals clearly that he is more fortunate and lucky than Rafael. In order to bring out more fully his good fortune, he tells her of certain remarks that the great Angelo himself made one day to Rafael, and which Andrea happened to overhear. He over heard that conversation long ago, and now he would report it to her exactly and truthfully.. That was the time when young Rafael was painting in Rome to decorate the palace, most probably of Pope, so that all Rome may see his paintings. At that time, he was really inspired and exultant. He was widely praised, and so was getting a little proud. It was in those days that Angelo told Rafael that there was a certain poor, mean and worthless fellow (Andrea himself) going about the streets of Rome. Nobody cared for him at the time, but he, if he were encouraged and inspired by Popes and Kings as Rafael had been, and was set to work to devise and paint pictures, would bring sweat to his face. In other words, he has great skill, and if proper encouragement were given to him, he would prove a formidable rival. By telling Lucrezia all this, he wants to impress her with his skill as a painter.

When you pray—has greater spiritual beauty, and so is more fit for devotional use. *The others' virgin*—the portrait of virgin Mary painted by Andrea. *As God lives*—a mild oath. Andrea swears to assure Lucrezia that he is telling her the truth. *His very self*—Angelo, the great painter, himself. *Flaming out his thoughts*—when his thoughts were rushing out in a flame of inspiration. *Too lifted up in heart*—too proud and exultant. *Scrub*—mean, worthless fellow. *Pricked on*—encouraged and inspired.

Lines 194—207. And indeed the arm......Give you more.

Andrea points out to Lucrezia his technical superiority as a painter, even over great and reputed painters like Rafael. Pointing to the arm of Rafael's pertrait of Virgin Mary, he tells her that the arm has been painted wrongly. Before the world, he dares not point out the fault of Rafael, so great is his name and popularity, but he can tell his wife without any fear. In order to show her where the arm is defective, he takes a piece of chalk and corrects it. But in a tone of bitter grief, he continues that the technical imperfections of Rafael do not matter much, because the soul of his portraits is always right, while his, Andrea's portraits lack soul, despite their technical perfection. His is, therefore, an inferior artist, far inferior to Rafael as

far as spiritual beauty is concerned. He does not care very much for what others say of him or what he (Angelo) said of him. He cares only for love, and for a place in her heart. Perhaps, at this point, Lucrezia interrupts him to inquire whom "he said", refers to. At this Andrea feels much hurt, for her question shows that she has already forgotten about the words of Angelo which he had overheard. It is an important matter for him, for it reveals his greatness as an artist, but it seems, his wife cares little for it. The implication of the conversation is that he lost his chances of winning recognition and success because he could not get the patronage of Kings and Popes. If this is so then she should be grateful to him that he gave up his career in France for her sake. Then realising that his words would offend her, he modifies his statement and says that she must be pleased at the thought that he loves her so much. He gave up his career only out of his love for her.

At this Lucrezia smiles, and her smile is a sufficient compensation to Andrea for his failure as an artist. The hour which he has passed in her company would always be cherished and remembered by him. At this, Lucrezia smiles again. Feeling amply rewarded by her smiles, he tells her to understand clearly that if she would sit with him in that way every night and smile at him, he would be inspired and would be able to paint better pictures. Then he would earn more, and so would be in a position to give her more money. Andrea knows that she does not love him, but loves only his money. Still, he is so infatuated with her that he wants to purchase her smiles with money.

This has been an hour—an hour always to be remembered and cherished.

Lines 208-218. See, it is settled......cement them with.

The darkness has increased and the stars have appeared in the sky. Mount Morello is no longer visible. The city walls can be seen only in the light which the watchmen have lighted at their posts. The cry of the cueowls which have been named after their cry, 'Ki-ou', can now be heard. Therefore, Andrea asks Lucrezia to come away from the window into their house which he had built to please her with money of the French king. He had built it so gay and beautiful, but now it seems melancholy to him, for he has failed to find in it domestic joy and harmony. Besides this, he suffers from the pricks of conscience. God in His justice has suitably punished him for his act of treachery and fraud to the French king. He prays that may King Francis pardon him for misappropriating his money. He has been sufficiently punished by his own conscience. When at night his eyes are tired as a result of having worked for long hours, and he looks up at the walls of the house, it seems to him that they have become golden. He sees each brick distinctly, and it seems to him that they are plastered with gold instead of cement. This is a constant reminder to him that the house was constructed with embezzled money. If only

she would love him and often sit with him, he would feel sufficiently compensated for all that he has suffered.

Morello is gone—the darkness has increased and so Mount Morello is no longer visible. *Cue......owls*—a species of owls named after their cry, "ki-ou". *Mortar*—cement.

Lines 219-233. That cousin here again......tell you of its worth.

Andrea wants Lucrezia to sit with him for some time more. But she says that her cousin, who is in reality her lover, is waiting outside and so she must go. Reluctanly, Andrea agrees to her leaving him, since he wants to see her alone and not in his company. She wants more money ; perhaps, she needs it to pay the debts which her cousin has incurred in gambling. Now he understands that she smiled at him not out of love, but only because she wanted money from him. So soulless has Andrea grown that still he wants her smiles, and he would be contented, even if she smiles at him merely to get money. In fact, Lucrezia has already bought him with her smiles, and he has no soul to call his own. He asks her, if she has more smiles, to spend them, too, on him. He will purchase her smiles with all that he can earn through his art. As long as he can work, as long as his powers are intact, he will go on working, and purchasing her smiles with what he earns. Only, he pleads with her once again, she should sit with him for the remaining part of the evening and bestow on him her charming smiles. She calls it merely a waste of time, but it refreshes him and enables him to work with greater energy the next morning. In one last effort to make her interested in his art, he tells her that that evening he would like to imagine how well he would paint now, if he were invited once again by the French King to work at his court, even if it were to paint only one picture. He would paint a portrait of Virgin Mary, but this time he would not paint it with her, Lucrezia, as his model. He would like it very much that she should sit with him as he works, and hear the great Michael Angelo praise his art. This would give him intense satisfaction, for in this way she would realise his real worth as an artist.

Lines 234—243. Will you ? Tomorrow satisfy......to please you more.

Andrea asks Lucrezia, if she is willing to sit with him for the rest of the evening. She can meet and satisfy her friend to-morrow. If she would give him her company for that evening, then he would be relaxed and refreshed and would be able to paint quite easily the picture which her friend wants for his art-gallery. He would be able to complete that picture off hand, quite easily. Andrea then shows her by his gestures how easily he would paint that picture tomorrow. If he hesitates to pay the full amount required to pay off the debts of her lover, he would paint one or two more pictures for him. In this way, he would get sufficient amount to clear the gambling debts of her friend. He would also earn the thirteen silver coins she needs to buy a frill for her dress. To give

her this money would be great pleasure for him, for he cares only for her and her desires This must satisfy her fully. Even her cousin can do no more for her. He wants her to tell him honestly why she is pleased with her cousin, and not with him. Why is it that she loves the cousin, and not her husband ?

Corridor—art-gallery. *Freaks*—gambling debts. *Scudi*—an Italian coin worth an English Crown or five shillings. *Ruff*—frill for the dress of a lady.

Lines 244—267. I am grown peaceful......Go, my love.

Andrea tells Lucrezia that at least that evening he is quite satisfied and serene, as serene and calm as a man should be in old age. He has no regrets, and no desire to change the past, even if the past could be changed. The best part of his life is already over, and he has no desire to change it. No doubt, he has been guilty of some crimes in the past. For example, he did a great wrong to king Francis. He misappropriated his money, but he was tempted by her to do so, and he built the house with that money at her request and in order to satisfy her. The real fault lies with her, and not with him. It was, no doubt, a great sin, but now it cannot be helped. The wrong done to the king cannot be mended. He has been guilty of another sin also, but there is justification for that too. He allowed his parents to die in poverty. But then it must be remembered that he was not rich, and whatever he earned, he earned it with the sweat of his brow. Secondly, each one must bear his lot. Thirdly, it must be remembered that his parents were born poor, they lived poor, and, therefore, it was but natural that they died poor. Poverty was their lot ; why should he be blamed for that. He himself has worked hard in his life, and has not been paid his due. He often received insufficient payment. This has been his misfortune, and he has to bear it. He might not be a good son, but let those, who are considered good sons, work hard like him and paint two hundred pictures. It will be found that they are neither so hard-working nor such good artists as he. His merits as an artist make good his faults as a son ; he may not have been a good son, but he is certainly a good artist.

Andrea then expresses his satisfaction at the way in which she has sat with him and loved him that evening. That is sufficient for him ; he does not require anything more. He is fully satisfied. He adds that, perhaps, in heaven he would get one more chance to paint a picture and thus show his worth and skill as an artist. It is just possible that God may desire the four walls of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, mentioned in the Bible, to be decorated with pictures. He will find that in His Heaven there are four great painters, Leonardo, Rafael, Angelo, and Andrea He would ask each of them to decorate one of the walls. He would thus be able to demonstrate his comparative superiority. But, the very next moment, he remembers that the other three would have no wives,

while he himself would still have Lucrezia as his wife. His infatuation for her would drag him down in heaven as well. The other three would be able to defeat him there also, as they have done in this world. But even then, he will choose her. He will prefer to have her always with him, even though it means his defeat as an artist.

The cousin's whistle is again heard, perhaps more insistent and urgent than before. So Andrea allows his wife to go to him.

Peaceful as old age—"with calm of mind all passion spent", as one should be in old age. *Tempted*—by Lucrezia. *Complied*—acted according to her wishes. *Somewhat*—he means a great deal. *There is something strikes a balance*—his skill as an artist balances or makes good his faults as a son, to some extent. *Meted*—measured. *Reed*—measuring rod.

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20

The Lost Leader

(a) THE POEM

I

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote ;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed :
How all our copper had gone for his service !
Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud !
We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die !
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch from their graves
He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves !

II

We shall march prospering,—not thro' his presence ;
Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre ;
Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire :
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
One more devil's-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God !
Life's night begins : let him never come back to us !
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again !
Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own ;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne !

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Date of Publication : Occasion of the Poem

The Lost Leader is ranked among one of the finest dramatic lyrics of Browning. It was first published in *Bells and Pomegranates*, in 1845, and then in the *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. It was inspired by William Wordsworth's acceptance of Poet Laureatship in 1843. Browning certainly had Wordsworth in mind and used him as his model for the lost leader of the poem. "It is a lament by the spokesman of a political party for the apostacy of a leader, whose greatness is still recognised and whose desertion is wistfully deplored" (**T. S. Young**). A letter from Browning to *Grosart* in 1875, shows the extent to which the parallel with the case of Wordsworth may be pressed : "I did in my hasty youth presume to use the great and venerable personality of Wordsworth as a sort of painter's model ; one from which this or the other particular feature may be selected and turned to account ; had I intended more, above all, such a boldness as portraying the entire man, I should not have talked about, "handfuls of silver and bits of ribbon." Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey had all recoiled from their extravagant early sympathies with the French Revolutionists. Wordsworth's mind became strongly conservative. He was a sturdy opponent of the *Reform Bill* and of *Catholic Emancipation*. Browning was generally in sympathy with liberal sentiment.

Critical Summary

The poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by a member of the Republican Party on behalf of his party. The speaker laments that their leader, whom they respected and honoured so much, has deserted them. He has been bribed by the Conservative Party, who offered him, "a handful of silver", and rank and position. These things they could not give him, though they could bestow upon him far greater gifts, like honour, worship, love and affection. They followed him and obeyed him. While Shakespeare, Shelley, Milton and Burns, were democrats all their lives, he alone sold his soul and sank to the level of slaves.

However, the desertion of their leader must not discourage them. They would go on fighting for their cause, inspired by others, if not by him. He may be noted down as a soul won over by the Devil, and lost to God and mankind. They taught him to fight, and now let him use that skill against them. They do not want him to return to them, for they can never again give him the same honour and confidence. Let him fight against them ; they are not afraid of him. Their cause is just, and so they would ultimately defeat him. Then they would pray for him and ask God to forgive him.

As a Dramatic Lyric

It is a noble, inspired poem, having all the intensity and emotional fervour of a genuine lyric. Browning has not expressed his personal emotions, but those of an imagined character, still there is the

proper emotional intensity of a true lyric. This intensity arises from Browning's sympathy with the Republican Cause. At the moment, when the lyric was composed, Browning really believed that Wordsworth had sold himself out for money, though he refuted this view later on and acknowledged his mistake. Moral indignation at Wordsworth's supposed betrayal of the cause of liberty accounts for the emotional fervour of the poem.

The Style

The lyric is short, and its style is simple and dignified. It is easy to follow, despite its density. Every line is packed with thought, even then the poem can be followed easily. However, Browning cannot entirely give up his fondness for inverted constructions. One or two lines even in this exquisite lyric are stumbling blocks in the way of the readers. For example, it is difficult to follow what Browing means exactly by the following,

"Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud"

or by, the following,

"Best fight on well, for we taught him."

(c) EXPLANATIONS AND ANNOTATIONS

Stanza 1

The poem is a monologue. It is the lament or comment of a young revolutionary or republican. He laments that one of their respected and honoured leaders has deserted their party, and gone over to the ruling Conservative party. The speaker has the great English poet, Wordsworth, in mind, who had full sympathy in his youth with the cause of the French Revolution, but later on became a staunch Conservative.

The speaker laments that their great leader has deserted them. He has been bribed by the ruling Conservative party. They gave him a small amount of money, and also honoured him by offering him a badge of honour to be worn in his coat. The speaker has in mind Wordsworth's acceptance of a pension of £ 300 only, in 1842, from the Government, and the office of the Poet Laureat which fell vacant just then. In this way, he got from the other party wealth and rank and honour, gifts which they could not give him, though they had other gifts—honour, love, worship—which they placed at his service. But he did not care for them and deserted them. The Conservative Party is rich and could give him gold. Instead, it gave him only silver and that, too, unwillingly. The Republican Party had only copper, but all of it would have gone to his service They could have given him only rags, for they are poor, but along with their rags, they would have given him the honour and worship due to a great hero, and he would have been proud of this. The Republicans loved him, honoured him, and followed him. They submitted willingly to his gentle and magnificent leadership. They made his views their own, and spoke as he used to speak. He was their model,

their idol, and they were ready to follow him in life and in death. But still he deserted them. Shakespeare was a Republican like them, Milton supported their principles, and Burns and Shelley were also democrats. They watch from their graves their fight for liberty, and guide and inspire them. They stuck to their principles upto the very end ; Wordsworth alone broke away from the progressive and the free, and accepted the slavery of the Conservatives. They purchased him with their money, and made him their slave.

One gift—wealth and the authority to grant rank and position, *Bereft*—deprived of. *All the others*—all the other gifts, such as love, honour. *Doled him out*—gave him unwillingly and insultingly, as if to a beggar.

Rags...were they purple—We would have given him rags, but they would have been given to him with due honour. *Lived in his... eye*—Willingly followed his gentle and splendid leadership.

Stanza 2

Though their leader has deserted them, yet the Republicans are not discouraged. They will go on fighting, and they are sure to get victory, though their leader will not be with them to inspire them with his songs and lyrics. They will do brave, heroic deeds, while their, "lost leader," would boast proudly of his weal h and office got from the ruling, Conservative Party. Inspired by other leaders, they will move on to do heroic deeds, while he will remain crouching like a slave, timid and inactive. His name should be removed from the list of lovers of freedom, and it should be noted down that he lost his soul for money. It should be noted that he declined to work for freedom, that he strayed from the path of virtue, that, while Devils rejoice victoriously at his desertion, angels shed tears of sorrow. His action is an insult to God, and a great wrong to mankind. No doubt, without him their life would be a life of darkness, they would lack the light of his active and guidance, but still they do not want him to return to them. If he returns, they would not have the same confidence in, and devotion for, him. They would doubt him and hesitate to follow him, and they would praise him only reluctantly. The darkness of doubt will always surround them ; they would never again have full, clear confidence in him. It is best, therefore, that he should continue to fight for the Conservative Party. They taught him to fight bravely, now let him use his skill in fighting against them. Let him challenge them. But they are not afraid, for they are sure of the ultimate victory of their just cause. Let him suffer defeat, and gain wisdom and experience through defeat. They will certainly defeat him, and then pray for him. They would pray to God to forgive his treachery to them.

Inspirit—inspire. *Quiescence*—acceptance ; slavery. *Crouch*—to sit timidly, like an animal ; to be inactive. *Blot*—remove., *Footpath*—the path of freedom no longer trod by the lost leader. *Life's night begins*—their life is dark without the light of his guidance. *New knowledge*—wisdom and experience acquired through defeat and humiliation.

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21

Porphyria's Lover

(*a*) THE POEM

The rain set early in to-night,
    The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
    And did its worst to vex the lake.
    I listened with heart fit to break,
When glided in Porphyria ; straight
    She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
    Blaze up, and all the cottage warm.
    Which done, she rose, and from her form,
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
    And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
    And, last, she sat down by my side,
    And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
    And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
    And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
    And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair.
Murmuring how she loved me—she
    Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,
To set its struggling passion free
    From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
    And give herself to me forever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
    Nor could to night's gay feast restrain,
A sudden thought of one so pale
    For love of her, and all in vain :
    So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes,
    Happy and proud ; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me ; surprise
    Made my heart swell, and still it grew,
    While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,

Perfectly pure and good : I found
A thing to do, and all her hair,
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she ;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids : again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck ; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss :
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still :
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead !
Porphyria's love : she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word !

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

The Publication of the Monologue

Porphyria's Lover, a short dramatic Monologue, was first published in 1836 with another poem *Johannes Agricola* in a monthly Magazine, *the Monthly Repository*. The two poems together were called Madhouse Cells. Later on, the poem was published in Dramatic lyrics, 1842. The monologue is spoken by the abnormal, if not actually insane, lover of Porphyria, after he has strangulated her.

Critical Summary

The poem opens with an admirable piece of nature-description. Young and beautiful Porphyria, separated from her lover by the barriers of social rank and birth, escaped from her house on a stormy night, when feasting and merry-making was going on. We are told,

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake.

The wind is personified as an agent of destruction, and thus the full fury and violence of the storm is brought home to the readers with a few, deft touches. The gale tore down the tops of elm-trees and ruffled the water of the lake, as if out of malice and contempt.

Porphyria's lover listened to the noise of the storm and was in a frustrated and despairing mood At that very moment, quite contrary to his expectation, his beloved stepped into his cottage. He was taken aback ; it must have required great courage on her part to come out on such a stormy night. Immediately after her entry into the cottage of her lover, Porphyria closed the door to shut out the cold and the storm. Then she knelt down to kindle up the dying fire. And no sooner had she made the fire, than the cottage became warm. This warmth and coziness within the cottage is well-contrasted with the chilliness and rain outside. She then got up and took off her dripping cloak, shawl, and hat, and her dirty gloves and laid them down. After this she stepped forward and sat by the side of her lover and lovingly addressed him. Her golden, long hair fell on her shoulders.

Having failed to get any reply from him, she made her smooth white shoulder bare and placed his cheek on it, while her golden hair spread all over her shoulders. In low, sweet voice she told him that she loved him dearly, but she was too weak to throw down the barrier of social customs, the high social status and authority of her guardians, that stood in the way of her impassioned love for him. Therefore, she was helpless in giving herself to him for ever, although she ardently and sincerely longed for it. Then she added that on occasions the passion of love in her grew so violent that nothing could restrain her from coming to him. It was so that night. Consequently, even feasting at her house could not hold her back from coming to him. That was the reason of her coming there in that severe storm and high wind.

Porphyria's lover, puffed up with joy and pride, looked straight into her eyes and could know at once that she really worshipped him, and that her love for him was truly sincere. Her profound and impassioned love for him made his heart swell with pride, and it swelled still more when he thought of a plan of action. At that moment, she was his. She was pretty, perfect and pure and good. Her beauty and grace and virginal innocence charmed him. In order to make her his own for ever, he madly decided to release her from the prison of social barriers by strangulating her. Just to execute his plan, he took her long hair and made them into a string, which he wound three times around her little soft throat and strangled her. It seemed as if no plain felt she, rather she remained as quiet as a bee locked up in a bud He opened her lids and found her blue eyes laughing, without a stain. Then he untightened the tresses from about her neck and her cheeks once more blushed bright beneath his burning kiss. He lifted up her head, but she was dead and hence her head could not lift itself up. His shoulder bore it. It dropped on it. It was a smiling, rosy little head and he was very glad that its last wish was fulfilled—the wish to meet her lover and die in his lap and be his for ever.

The dead and the living sat together the whole night, without stirring for a moment. And God did not express his disapproval of

the lover's act. Perhaps, He approved the unconventional action of Porphyria in running away from her home, and the abnormal act of murder committed by the lover, in order to make her his own for ever.

Language and Diction

The language of the monologue is a model of lucidity and clarity. It is easy but dignified, and entirely free from the obscurities and difficulties which mar so much of Browning's poetry. Some of its lines are exquisite and felicitous in their diction :

> *As a shut bud that holds a bee,*
> *I warily opened her lids.*

Such lines have almost a Shakespearean felicity of expression.

The Meaning of the Poem

While the language is transparent, it is the meaning of the poet, his intention in writing the monologue. that has baffled the critics. Some have regarded it as a, "social satire," on the pride of rank and birth, others have called it a study in, "morbid and abnormal psychology". Still others are of the view that in the monologue, the poet advocates a bold and unconvention behaviour on the part of true lovers. There is no doubt that Browning always commenaed bold action, even if it was considered improper by society, as necessary for success in love. For example, his Duchess in *The Flight of the Duchess* elopes with her Gipsy lover, and the poet is all admiration for her. While there can be no doubt that the poet would like to hold out a bold action, like that of Porphyria, there is no justification for believing that he would go to the extent of advocating a murder, even for the sake of love. But the last line of the poem, "*And yet God has not said a word,*" seems to imply divine approval, and so also of the poet.

Was the Lover Insane ?

And then the question arises, as to why the lover committed the murder. Most critics are of the view that the lover was insane. But this view is ruled out by the fact that the way in which he narrates the story does not indicate any mental disorder There is no incoherence in his narration. Another view is that the crime was committed, "in a momentary aberration or even intense excitement of feeling." But this view, too cannot be upheld, for the lover does not feel any regret or remorse after the deed. He seems rather to be glad and proud of the murder he has committed. Desperate deeds are often committed in moments of intense mental agitation, but for ever afterwards there is remorse for them. There is no remorse in the present case.

The Gripping Interest

However it may be, the monologue in gripping in its interest. The deed round which the poem is built might be horrible, but still it carries its own charm and fascination. It might be one of the earliest of the poet's monologues, but still it ranks very high as far as its intensity, its beauty, and its lucidity are concerned. The poet has given us a peep into a human soul, it may be an abnormal one. The whole incident is narrated with such simplicity and naturalness that an act, which by all canons of law and judgment, is nothing but mad and revolting, does not create any horror or disgust in our mind.

22

One Word More

(*a*) THE POEM

I

There they are, my fifty men and women,
Naming me the fifty poems finished !
Take them, Love, the book and me together ;
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume,
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas :
These, the world might view—but one, the volume,
Who that one, you ask ? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her life-time ?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow,
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving—
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's ?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not ? than wonder at Madonnas—
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that's left with lilies in the Louvre—
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple,
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.

Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, "Ours, the treasure !"
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel :
Whom to please ? You whisper "Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he—"Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily, dreadful line to)
"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet—"Then I stopped my painting."

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante.
Would we not ?—than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those "people of importance :"
We and Bice bear the loss forever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture ?

IX

This : no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize !) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
Using nature that's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry,—
Does he paint ? he fain would write a poem,—
Does he write ? he fain would paint a picture,

Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

X

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked—"Shall smiting help us?"
When they drank and sneered—"A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks—"But drought was pleasant."
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savors of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness—the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—
"Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better."

XI

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XII

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the AEthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XIII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me ;
So it seems : I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me ;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing :
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love !

XIV

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly.
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once, as I do.

XV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving :
I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence :
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished ;
Where my heat lies, let my brain lie also !
Poor the speech ; be how I speak, for all things.

XVI

Not but that you know me ! Lo, the moon's self !
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with color,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.

Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVII

What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stône, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVIII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure—the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XIX

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you—yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.

But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom !

(*b*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION

Date of Publication : The Dedication

On Word More was appended as an *Epilogue* to Browning's collection of fifty Dramatic Monologues, entitled *Men and Women*, and first published in 1855. Through this fine lyric Browning dedicated the volume to his beloved wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, saying,

Take them, Love, the book and me together,
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

She has already his heart and his love, and now, through this dedication, he offers to her the fruit of his intellect as well. As **S.A Brooke** points out, "the relations between Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning had all the wonder and beauty of a medieval romance", and this admirable lyric gives us an idea of the devotion which existed between the two It is one of those few poems in which the poet throws off his dramatic guise, and speaks directly, in his own person, to his beloved. "Few poems express so much feeling with so much historical allusion and natural imagery...... It is full. and full to the brim. with the long experience of peaceful joy in married life" (**S A. Broke**) In her *Sonnets From the Portuguese*, 1846, Elizabeth Barrett had poured forth all her love for Browning, and *One Word More* is Browning's reply to her wonderful tribute.

Direct Expression of Personal Emotion : Lyric Intensity

Great artists and great genuises, in all ages and countries, have always expressed their love, their personal emotions, in a medium and manner different from the one which was usual for them. Thus Dante, the poet, turned painter to paint a portrait exclusively for his beloved Beatrice, and Rafael, the painter, penned a century of sonnets for the exclusive eye of his beloved. In the same way, Browning also speaks directly, in his own person, to express his love for his wife, and not indirectly through assumed characters, as was usual with him. While the other pieces in the Collection (*Men and Women*) are dramatic monologues, *One Word More* alone, expressive of his love of his wife, is a lyric, the sweetest and the intensest lyric ever penned by Browning. Moreover, while the rest of his poetry is cast in Iambic blank verse, the basis of the present lyric is Trochaic pentameter. He

has used for the lyric Trochaic blank verse, something unusual for him to do.

Critical Summary : Development of Thought

The poet first expresses the view that the manner, style and versification of a poet are different, from the habitual manner and style of that poet, when he speaks of his own love and emotions. He then proceeds to explain why artists and poets, when they speak of their personal emotions, always express themselves in a different art-form or at least in a different manner. The poor workman, the most unskilful artisan, will strive to do something which shall express his utmost effort, to present to his love, and the greatest geniuses of the world have been actuated by a similar motive. Rafael, not content with painting, poured out his soul in poetry for the woman of his heart, and she loved the volume of a hundred sonnets expressive of his love all her life, and Mr. Browning says he and his poet-wife would rather read that volume than wonder at the Madonnas by which Rafael's name will be ever known. But that volume will never be read by them. Guido Reni treasured it, but, as treasures do disappear, it vanished. Dante once proposed to paint for Beatrice an angel—traced it perchance with the corroded pen with which in his *Inferno*, he pricked the stigma in the brow of the wicked—"*Dante, who loved well because he hated*"—hating only wickedness, and that because it hinders loving. Browning would rather study that angel than read a fresh *Inferno*, but that picture they shall never see, because Dante could never complete it. He was disturbed in his work by, "some people of importance". No artist lives and loves who desires not, for once and for one, to express himself through a medium different from the one he habitually uses to express himself; and so the painter will forego his painting and write a poem, the writer will try to paint a picture, "*Once and for one only*",

"*So to be the man and leave the artist*".

Why is this so? When a man comes before the world as a leader, teacher, prophet, artist or poet, in any capacity which is his proper business, he is open to the unsympathetic criticism of a world which is ever exacting and always ungrateful in exact proportion to the magnitude of the work done for it. Under these circumstances, the real self in the man seldom appears: when, however, he presents himself before the sympathetic soul of the woman who loves him, he no longer works for the critic, no longer acts a part, no longer appears in a character distasteful to himself. For example, when Moses smote the rock and saved the Israelites, he had mocking and sneering for his reward : the ungrateful and unbelieving multitude behaved in an ungrateful manner as is usual with them. Could Moses forget this wrong and injustice ? He bore the memory all his life, and it coloured his future acts. But were there in all that crowd a woman's face—a woman he could love—he would have for her sake laid down the wonder-working rod, for he would then be as the camel, giving up its store of water together with its life.

As regards himself, the poet says he shall never paint pictures, carve statues, or express himself in music. He lacks such versatility of gifts. To express his love for his wife, he stands on his power of verse alone, and so he bids her take the lines of this love-poem, which he has written for her eye alone. As the artist in fresco will steal a hair-pencil and cramp his spirit into missal-painting for his lady, and as the musician who usually sounds the martial strain will breathe his love through a silver flute to serenade his beloved, a princess ; so he—Browning, a men known for his dramatic monologues—may this once whisper a love song to the ear of his wife. He will speak to her not dramatically, as he spoke in the other poems in the book, but in his own true person. She knows him under both aspects, as the moon of Florence is the same which shines in London, though she has put off her Italian glory, and hurries disspiritedly through the gloomy skies of England. She, too, has another side to her character, a side which is revealed only to him. Could the moon really love a mortal, she has a side she could turn towards him, unseen as yet by the herdsman or the astronomer on his turret. Dumb to Homer, to Keats even, she would speak to him. And so the poet has for his love,

> "*A side the world has never seen*",

the novel and unseen,

> "*Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of*".

The Moon-image

"*With the incense of the poet's worship of his own bride is here mingled the fragrant memory of the illustrious, "far-renowned brides of ancient song*'." He calls Elizabeth his, "*Moon of poets*". In this connection **W.L. Phelps** rightly remarks, "The notable thing about the moon is that whereas the earth, during one revolution about the sun, turns on its axis three hundred and sixty-five times, the shy moon takes exactly the same length of time to turn around, as she takes to circle once around the earth. For this reason, earth's inhabitants have never seen but one side of the Moon, and never will. Elizabeth Browning is his Moon, because she shows the other side to him alone. The radiant splendour of her poetry fills the whole earth with light ; but to her husband only she shows the other side, the loving, domestic woman, the unspeakably precious and intimate associate of the daily life. The world thinks it knows her but it has seen only one side ; it knows nothing of the marvellous depth and purity of her real nature."

A Perfect Lyric

The poem is noteworthy in more ways than one. It is a fine lyric, remarkable for its emotional intensity. It pulsates with all the warmth of the poet's passion for his wife. It comes direct from the heart of the poet, and so goes direct to the heart of the readers. It is characterised by sincerity, spontaneity, and intensity, as a good

lyric should be. The line, "*where the heart lies, let the brain lie also*", burns with the fire of the poet's emotions. The poet states a particular point of view, *i.e.* that artists and geniuses in love express themselves through a different manner and medium, and proceeds to give arguments, and cites illustration after illustration, in support of his point of view. **S.A. Brooke** rightly remarks, "It is a finished piece of art, carefully conceived, upbuilded stone by stone, touch by touch, each separate thought with its own emotion, each adding something to the whole, each pushing Browning's emotion and picture into our souls, till the whole impression is received." A lyric is usually short, built round a single emotion or mood, while *One Word More* is a long poem of over 200 lines in twenty stanzas. However, its length does not detract in any way from its intensity of emotion ; this is so because it speaks not of a transient passion, but of the love of a whole life of married felicity.

Exquisite Nature-painting

This fine lyric, the object of admiration of all lovers of literature, is also remarkable for its vivid and accurate nature-painting. Specially exquisite is the following picture of the moon, describing the transmutation she undergoes in her three phases :

Not but that you know me ! Lo, the moon's self !
Here in London, yonder late in Florence.
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured,
Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new cresent of a hair's breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded,
Now, a piece of her old self. impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house-roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

The poet observed the Crescent Moon at Florence, then the full Moon in all its glory over Samminiato church, and then the aged Moon over London. He paints on the basis of personal observation, and hence the accuracy, realism, and appeal of his picture.

Style and Diction

As regards the style of the lyric, it is free, to a very great extent, from the usual faults of Browning. There certainly are a few inverted, involved constructions, as in the following :

You and I would rather read that volume,
(Taken to his beating bosom by it)
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not ? Than wonder at Madonnas.

Sometimes, there is also an excessive use of parentheses as in the description of Dante's writing the scenes of his *Inferno.* In the following, there is, no doubt, some confusion and incoherence :

> *When, his left hand in the hair of the wicked,*
> *Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,*
> *Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment.*

There is also, no doubt, that the style is heavily over-loaded with the poet's learning. There are references and allusions to Italian poets and painters, like Dante and Rafael, and their works, and to Guido Reni, of whom few have any knowledge, to classical mythology and legends, and to Biblical mythology and legend. The entire episode of Moses and the Israelites, based closely on the *Old Testament,* occupies a prominent place in the poem and is central to Browning's argument. Such allusions do create some difficulty, at least for Indian students, but they can be mastered with a little effort, and then the full force and reality of Browning's conceptions is fully appreciated.

The lyric is not obscure ; most of it is remarkable for its clarity and lucidity. Only a little painstaking is required on the part of the readers, and then the lyric yields all its rich treasures.

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Stanza I

The poem *One Word More* is a personal poem expressing the deep love of the poet for his wife, Elizabeth Barrett. The poem was added as an *Epilogue* to his *Men and Women,* a volume containing fifty poems dealing with the history of the souls of fifty men and women. In this way, the poet dedicated the volume to his beloved.

Addressing her, the poet says that the volume of poems which he has just completed has been called *Men and Women,* because it deals with the soul-histories of fifty men and women. By dedicating the volume to her, he is placing the product of his intellect at her service. His heart, *i.e.* his love, already belongs to her. Now his brain, *i.e.* his poetry, will also be hers. In this way, he will belong to her both heart and soul.

My fifty men and women—the collection of fifty poems dealing with the histories of the souls of fifty men and women. *Me*—this '*Me*' is superfluous. *Take them love*—the poet asks his beloved to accept the volume of poems which he now dedicates to her through *the Epilogue. And me*—his love and affection. *Where the heart lies*—his heart lies already with her ; it already belongs to her. *Let the brain lie also*—'brain' stands for his poetry, the product of his intellect. She should accept his poems also. In this way, he would belong to her heart and soul.

Stanza II

Rafael, the famous Italian painter, wrote a hundred sonnets. He wrote them with the same silver-tipped pencil which he used to

draw his portraits of Virgin Mary. His paintings of the Virgin Mary are for the appreciation of the world, while his one, and only one, volume of poems was meant for one person alone. There is no need for him to tell her (Elizabeth) who that one person was ; her own love for him would tell her that she must have been Rafael's beloved. Instinctively, she will realise that the volume of poems must have been intended for the painter's beloved. The lady loved the volume passionately all her life. The lady, La Fornarina, whom the poet loved and to whom the hundred sonnets were addressed, had the volume in her hands at the moment of her death. As she died, the volume dropped from her hand on her pillow. For her it was the poet's cheek which touched her own at the moment of death. Rafael was so very loving and affectionate, he had such a sense of duty, that for a short while he turned from a painter into a poet, and poured out his heart to her in that small collection of sonnets. Rafael owed his fame and glory to his paintings ; but for La Fornarina his real glory lay in the poems which he addressed to her, and in which he opened out his heart. It was her love which had turned him into a poet, and, therefore, she valued his tribute to her above everything else.

A century of sonnets—no such collection of hundred sonnets from the pen of the painter has come down to us. He has left behind him only four sonnets. This is a fiction on the part of the poet invented to suit his purpose.

Rafael—the renowned Italian painter. *Dinted*—marked ; written. *Silver pointed*—silver tipped. *Madonnas*—the portraits of Virgin Mary. Rafael has left behind him a number of Madonnas which are still treasured in the art galleries of the world. *These, the world might view*—the Madonnas were intended for the appreciation of the world. *But one*—only one, the beloved of the poet. *Your heart instructs you*—She, Elizabeth, would instinctively realise who that person could have been. She must have been the painter's beloved.

Did she live......life time—this and the questions which follow are all rhetorical. They have been asked merely to impart force and effectiveness. The line means that the lady loved and treasured the volume all her life. *The lady of the sonnets*—La Fornarina, who worked as the painter's model, whom he loved passionately, and whom he ultimately married. It is to her that the sonnets are supposed to have been addressed.

In place of Rafael's glory—in place of the paintings of Rafael to which he owed his glory in the world.

Rafael's cheek—the book touched her cheeks ; thus the book was transformed into the poet's cheek by her love.

Her love had turned a poet's—It was her love which turned him from a painter into a poet.

Stanza III

They, the poet and his beloved, Elizabeth, would prefer to read Rafael's poems to looking at his paintings. The poems are an

expression of his passion. They are the outpouring of his feelings, and so a study of the poems would take them nearer to the heart of the painter than his paintings. They would prefer, in this way, to listen to his heart-beats to gazing with admiration and wonder at his various Madonna's, which are regarded by the world as great art-treasures.

Beating bosom—heart throbbing with love. *List*—listen. *Her, San Sisto names*—the Madonna Di San Sisto, named after the town San Sisto, and placed in the art gallery of Dresden. *Her, Foligno*—The Madonna Di Foligno, named after Foligno, was placed for some time in the art gallery of this city, but is now in Rome. *Her, that...... in a vision*—the portrait which represents the virgin as a vision seen by a devotee of Florence. It is now in the Pitti Palace, Florence. *Her, that......the Louvre*—In this portrait, we have a group of three figures, *i.e.*, Virgin Mary, as mother, her Child, Jesus, and St. John, the Baptist. *In Circle*—The last mentioned Madonna is circular in form. *Left with lilies*—left in a garden of the Louvre, and hence the French name of the portrait, La Belle Jardiniere.

Stanza IV

The poet says that he and his beloved wife will never be able to read the volume of poems left behind by Rafael, for the volume has been lost. It came into the hands of Guido Reni, the famous Italian painter, who loved it like the apple of his own eye, and guarded it as his most cherished treasure. He did not permit any one else to read it. When the painter was dying, the people of the City of Bologna thought that now the precious book will come to them, and they would be able to read it But like all good things, this volume of poems also disappeared and no one could say where it had gone. So the people of Bologna could not read it, and they, too, would not be able to read it.

Guido Reni—the famous Italian painter, 1575-1642, who lived in the city of Bologna, Italy, during the last twenty years of his life. The painter did possess a volume containing a century of drawings from the pencil of Rafael, and it was lost in the way described by Browning. The poet has altered reality to suit his purpose.

Stanza V

Just as Rafael, a painter, turned into a poet and composed poems to please his lady-love, in the same way, Dante, the famous Italian poet, the poet of *the Divine Comedy*, turned into a painter out of his love for his beloved, Beatrice. He painted the portrait of an angel in order to present it to his beloved. He touched and re-touched the portrait so as to make it a perfect work of art. Perhaps, he painted it with the same pen with which he had written the *Divine Comedy*, and which had been eaten away a little by the hot ink he had used to describe the scenes of *Inferno* (Hell) in his masterly epic. What Browning means to say is that the scenes of the *Inferno* seem to have been written with a pen of fire. It was as if he had dipped his pen in

some hot ink to write these terrible scenes. The poet mentions one particular scene described in Canto XXXII of the *Inferno*. In this scene, Dante tells us that while he was in *Inferno*, he came across a traitor, Bosca Abati by name, caught hold of him by the hair with his left hand, and ordered him to tell him, the poet, his name, or he will root out all his hair. From Browning's imaginative account of the incident, it seems as if Bosca were some traitor actually living in Florence at the time of Dante, and the poet, caught hold of the traitor with his left hand, marked his forehead with the stigma of treachery, cut his flesh, and used it as a perchment, and then released him, and allowed him to go through the streets of Florence with the brand on his forehead causing him incessant pain, and his wounds rotting and giving out foul smell. What Browning means to say is that Dante hated wickedness in all its forms, and it was this hatred of wickedness which made him write the *Inferno* scenes so forcefully and effectively. Dante hated wickedness as it is wickedness which comes in the way of true love. It was Dante's hatred of wickedness which made him such a true and devoted lover.

While Dante was busy in working at his portrait of the angel, while he was touching and re-touching it, there entered his room certain people of importance, and they disturbed him in his work. These people of Florence were as wicked as the people described in *Inferno*. The moving and forceful hell scenes are meant for such wicked people, who may read them and thus realise their own fate. Such wicked people are sure to go to hell and suffer there. They disturbed the poet in his work, and as Dante himself has told us, he could not complete his portrait.

Beatrice—the lady whom Dante loved. It was a case of Platonic love, for he continued to love her, even when she was married to another, and he himself married another lady. She represents Dante's conception of an ideal woman. He was inspired to write by his love of her.

Traced and re-traced it—touched and re-touched it to make it perfect. *Per adventure*—perhaps. *Corroded*—eaten away ; consumed. *Pricked its stigma*—marked his brow with certain words showing that he was a traitor ; branded him a traitor, as if with a red-hot iron, as criminals were branded in the past. *When his left hand......its stigma*—the lines in the *Inferno* on which the description is based are :

"*Then seizing on his hinder scalp I cried,*
Name thee, or not a hair shall tarry here."

Bit—cut. *Parchment*—a piece of skin or the bark of a tree used as paper. *Loosed him*—released the wicked traitor. *Writing*—the words engraved on his forehead as a mark of his treachery and wickedness. *Rankle*—cause him incessant pain. *Festering*—with his wound rotting and giving out foul smell. *The folk of his Inferno*—wicked people like those described in *the Inferno*, people who were destined to be denizens of Hell. *Certain people of importance*—people who had a high opinion of their own importance or people of rank and position.

Entered and would......poet—entered in, disturbed the poet, and diverted him from his work which could, therefore, never be completed.

Such he gave......lines to—they were the wicked people about whom the poet had been writing every day with such force in his *Inferno*. His *Inferno* is meant for the study of such people.

Stanza VI

The poet and his beloved wife, Elizabeth, would prefer to see Dante's portrait of the angel to reading his *Inferno*. The *Inferno* was meant for the vulgar eye of the world, while the angel was meant only for the eye of Dante's Beatrice. It was expressive of his passion, and so they are attracted by it, and would like to have a look at it. They are not interested in tracing out any other *Inferno* which might have been left behind by Dante and which has remained undiscovered so far. They only want that Dante's portrait should be traced out so that they may look at it and appreciate it.

Stanza VII

The poet and his beloved wife will never see Dante's portrait of an angel, because he could never complete it. It was his love of Beatrice that inspired Dante to paint the angel. It was his love of his beloved that made him linger over it with tenderness, and touch and re-touch it so as to make it perfect. As he painted it, Dante constantly thought of his beloved. But alas! he was disturbed in his work by some important people of Florence, and so the portrait remained incomplete. These vain and proud people, filled with a sense of their own importance, did not know the great harm they caused to Beatrice, and to all lovers like the poet and his wife.

Bice—Beatrice, the beloved of Dante. *Softened*—looked tenderly at.

Stanza VIII

The poet has reminded his beloved of the century of sonnets penned by Rafael, the painter, and of the portrait of an angel painted by Dante, the poet. What is his object in reminding her of a painter, turned poet, and of a poet, turned painter? In this stanza, he asks the question, and in the next he himself proceeds to answer it.

Stanza IX

In the previous stanza, the poet had asked his beloved, wife, as to why Rafael turned a poet, and Dante turned a painter. In the present stanza, he himself replies to the question.

No artist did ever live and love who once, and once only, and for one person alone, his beloved, did not desire to express himself through a medium which would be appropriate, beautiful, and adequate to express his love effectively. In order to express his love

adequately and effectively, he turns to some other art in which he is not as skilled, as others may be, but in which he expresses himself simply, directly, and naturally. At least once in his life time, he does not express himself through his own art which long habit and use have turned for him into a second nature. At least on this one occasion, he does not express himself in the art which has become habitual to him and which has changed his nature into something like an artifice. Through this art he does not express his natural feelings, but only what is conventional and socially acceptable. Therefore, for once at least, he gives up the artistic gift which he has made peculiarly his own, as if it were his birth right. On this one occasion, if he is a painter, he expresses himself through poetry, and if a poet, he uses the medium of paint to express himself. In this way, on this particular occasion, he tries his hand at some other art which is not his own. Once at least in his life time, he expresses himself through an art which is foreign to his nature, so that he may express his natural feelings of love and affection as a man, unhampered by artistic conventions and usage. In this way, he feels the natural joy of an ordinary human being which comes from self-expression, and is freed for a while from the cares and anxieties which beset an artist. His expression of personal emotion in a foreign medium is intended for one person alone, and so he writes unhampered by the fear of criticism which he has to face for his works meant for the public eye.

To find his love a language—to express his love through a medium of expression. *Sufficient*—adequate and effective for the expression of his love.

Using nature......art to others—What is art to others is nature to him, because in it he expresses himself naturally and instinctively, unhampered by the rules and conventions of art.

Art that is turned his nature—He does not use the art which he habitually practises, and which has changed his nature into something like artifice. His habitual art cannot express his real soul, for there the flow of his natural feelings is hampered by the rules and conventions of art.

His proper dowry—the art which he usually practises, and which is, therefore, his inheritance or birth right.

Put to proof—try his hand at. *Alien*—foreign, which is not his own.

So to be the man—in this way, to express naturally his feelings as a man. *Leave the artist*—forget the cares and worries of an artist.

Stanza X

In this stanza, the poet explains why a great artist leaves his usual art, and expresses his love through a medium foreign to him. Artistic genius is a gift of God, but it suffers depreciation in the world from the hostile criticism of unsympathetic critics, as well as from the impossibility of any finite, earthly medium to express the infinite vision of the artist. Great sorrow and suffering and loss of artistic

powers is caused to the artist by hostile criticism. In order to explain the point, the poet cites the example of the prophet Moses, from *the Bible.* The Jews, the children of Israel, were prosecuted and cruelly treated in Egypt and so were forced to leave the country, in search of some new homeland across the desert. During the journey, they suffered from acute thirst and demanded water from Moses, their prophet and leader. Then Moses performed a miracle. He struck a rock with his stick and water came out of it. The Israelites could thus quench their thirst, but they were ungrateful and did not thank him for the way in which he had saved their lives. Rather, they grumbled and belittled his achievement. Their ungratefulness was expressed in three stages. First, they asked what good it would be to them, if Moses struck the rock with his rod. They did not believe that water can be produced in this way. Secondly, they said that it is quite easy to produce water by striking a rock. Thirdly, they ungratefully pointed out that they were much better off in Egypt, where they used to eat meat out of pots. In any case, their earlier thirsty condition was much better than their present condition. Such was the ingratitude of the Israelites. Moses made himself immortal the moment he performed the miracle of producing water out of a barren rock, but that very moment also showed that he was a mortal, subject to the joys and sorrows of ordinary humanity. The mockery, the ingratitude, and the criticism of the people, whom he had provided with the means of life, disgusted and irritated him, and thus deprived the miracle of its sacred character. Were he to be called upon ever again to perform such another miracle, he would remember the earlier ingratitude of the people and their hostile criticism, and the burden of these memories would cloud his behaviour, make him ungraceful in his performance, and careless in his gestures and movements.

Browning applies the case of Moses to the artists in general. Just like Moses, artists, too, suffer in this world from the ingratitude of the people and their hostile criticism. The artist, divinely inspired, is compared to Moses, and the hostile and ungrateful people and critics to the ungrateful and critical Israelites. As a result of such undeserved criticism and unsympathetic treatment, the gifts of an artist suffer depreciation. The artist, with his mind burdened with memories of earlier insults and mockery, cannot work gracefully and naturally. However much the artist may try to satisfy the critics, he always gets insults and dissatisfaction from them. Like Israelites, they belittle his achievement and even go to the extent of saying that the earlier art forms were much better. They do not appreciate any originality or innovation, or the real greatness or contribution of the artist. Earlier insults and undeserved criticism cloud his memory. It is for this reason that in his choosen art-form, the artistic fails to express himself naturally and gracefully. He turns to some other art, when he has to express the natural feelings of his heart.

Earth's abatement—depreciation from hostile criticism of the people of the world.

Bidding drink......beneath him—Inverted construction : "Bidding a crowd beneath him drink and live."

Even he......immortal—the moment, Moses performed the miracle, he became immortal.

Proved......the minute—the minute, the moment, also proved that Moses was a mortal with ordinary joys and sorrows. His pain, his suffering, his disappointment at the ungratefulness of his people, were all human.

Desecrates—lessened the sacred character of. *Belike*—perhaps. *While he smites*—were he called upon to perform the same miracle once again, he would remember the previous criticism, and the memory would fill him with disgust. All this is applicable to the case of an artist, like Browning, who suffered, like Moses, from hostile criticism.

Drought—Thirst, from which they suffered in the desert. *Savors of disrelish*—inspires disgust.

Thus achievement......somewhat—the artist still creates, but his works lack grace. *O'er-importuned......mandate*—Memories, burdened with past insult and mockery, spoil their artistic bent of mind. The artist's genius is hampered by memories of earlier criticism and mockery. *Carelessness......gesture*—the artist grows self-conscious or careless in his work.

Phalanxed faces—hostility of critics ranged against him like an army of hostile soldiers. *Phalanx*—a military formation ; a regiment or a battalion.

'Customed—usual. *Prelude*—the beginning of hostile criticism. *Prove the sequel*—the likely close or end of that criticism. *Egypt's flesh-pots*—the pots out of which the Israelites used to eat meat while they were in Egypt. *Flesh-pots*—symbolise a materialistic life devoid of spiritual values. *Nay, the draught was better*—Unsympathetic critics fail to appreciate originality, and novelty, and say that the old art forms were better. They are like Israelites who ungratefully expressed their satisfaction with their earlier thirsty condition.

Stanza XI

Such is the nature of the common people that they are not convinced of the greatness of a man, unless they are given convincing and palpable proofs of that greatness. For example, the Israelites were not convinced that Moses was a prophet of God, till he showed them the two tablets with the *Ten Commandments* inscribed over them, which God had bestowed upon him on Mount Sinai, where He appeared to Moses in a forked flame of lightning. He had to convince them that he was really a Prophet by performing a miracle. They could have faith in him only when he raised the rod which he always carried in his right hand, struck the rock with it, and then produced water from it. They were convinced of his greatness only when he talked to them in an authoritative and commanding manner. Such

is the nature of the multitude that they can never resist a Prophet. They are easily taken in by a man who speaks to them in a commanding manner, and imposes upon them by performing wonders.

Moses symbolises artists, and the Israelites the common herd of mankind. The artist must constantly give proofs of his greatness, show extraordinary signs of genius, otherwise his greatness will not be recognised by the world. The common man has no understanding of reality ; he is deceived easily by externals. He can easily be imposed upon by a pose of greatness.

The crowd—the common multitude. *Emphatic warrant*—convincing proof of his professional greatness. *Sinai*—the name of a mountain in Palestine. *Forehead*—peak of Sinai mountain, where according to *the Old Testament*, God appeared to Moses in a forked flame of lightning and bestowed upon him *the Ten Commandments* engraved upon two tablets. *Cloven*—forked. *Brilliance*—the flame of lightning which marked the appearance of God.

Right arm's rod-sweep—the reference is to the rod which Moses carried in his right hand and with which he performed miracles. *Tongue's imperial fiat*—Commanding and authoritative way of speaking. *Fiat*—a solemn command.

Stanza XII

Moses had a host of followers before whom he appeared as a prophet and convinced them of his greatness by performing Miracles. But he would have behaved in an entirely different way, were there one woman among them whom he loved and longed for. Had he seen among the Israelites, the face of Zipporah, his wife and (the daughter of Jethro), fair coloured and delicate, or that of the Abyssinian slave-girl whom also he loved and married, his actions would have been entirely different. Then he would not have performed any miracle to provide his thirsty beloved with water. Then he would have acted like the patient camel, who sacrifices his own life to save that of his mistress who owns him. The camel has a scanty store of water which he hoards in his stomach for his own use in the deserts of Arabia However, without any grumbling or complaint he allows his abdomen to be ripped open when his mistress stands in need of water, and thus gives her his water as well as his own life. Similarly, had Moses seen his beloved among the host of Israelites, he would not have performed any miracle to impose upon her. Rather, he would have appeared in his true colours, and out of love would have been willing to lay down his own life at her feet. It is love, which inspires a man and makes him capable of noble self-sacrifice.

Through the example of the camel, the poet illustrates his point that the behaviour of a man when in love is different from his usual, conventional behaviour.

Jethro's daughter—the name of the father-in-law of Moses. The name of his wife was Zipporah. *AEthiopian bond-lave*—Moses also married a slave-girl of AEthopia or Abyssinia. *Hoard*—the water which

the animal has stored in his stomach for his own use. *Mistress*—the lady who owns the camel and whom the animal loves.

Stanza XIII

Browning now speaks of his own love and addresses his beloved wife, Elizabeth, directly. Rafael and Dante were artists of a versatile talent. They could express their love through an art different from the one they usually practised. But he does not have such versatility of talent. His love is second to none, but in the remaining part of his life, despite his passionate love of her, he would be able to express himself neither through painting, nor through sculpture or music. He does not possess these gifts. He can express his love for her only through poetry. In this life, he has been gifted with only this one talent ; he can offer her his poetry alone and nothing else. It is just possible, that in lives to come, God may bless him with other gifts and he may achieve success in other arts. But whatever gifts he may attain in other lives, whatever heights of achievement he may reach in times to come, all will be entirely devoted to her service. He will always love her and offer to her the best he has to offer.

I stand on my attainment—the poet depends entirely on the one gift *i.e.*, the gift of poetry that he has.

Other heights—success and achievement in other arts. *All the gifts......your own, love*—"All the other forms of high art which I shall achieve in other lives will be consecrated to your love."

Stanza XIV

The poet, Browning, has only one gift, only one talent that of writing poetry. He cannot express his love through a different medium, as Rafael and Dante did. But he can use his own particular medium with a slight difference. He can write poems in a slightly different manner and style. He is habituated to writing the dramatic monologues, but he can change his manner a little and write lyric poetry to express his love for his beloved wife. The difference would be slight and subtle, but she would be able to perceive it, and her love would teach her to appreciate its significance. In the poem, which he is offering to her, he has spoken directly in his own person of his love of her, and not through an assumed character as is usually the case with him. She should accept this offering of love, and read it closely and lovingly. It is for the first time that he has penned a love-lyric, and it would be his last. For the world at large he would write dramatic monologues, for her alone he has written a personal, subjective poem. A painter, who paints on a large scale on plastered walls, may, under the inspiration of love, practice self-control, make his art sub ordinate to love, and paint miniature figures on the margins of his beloved's prayer-book. He may decorate her prayer-book with flowers, and thus practise an art strange and unfamiliar. A musician, who plays martial

music on a musical instrument of brass, may play soft and tender music on a silver flute to soothe the sleep of his beloved, a princess. In the same way, he, who habitually writes dramatic monologues, may compose a tender lyric, like the present one, as an offering of love for his beloved. It is love which teaches a man to change his usual style of expression, and adopt a new one.

Yet a semblance......avails—though he cannot express his love through a different medium, yet he can slightly change his usual style and manner. *Shades so finely touched*—the difference would be slight and subtle. *Love's sense......it*—but the love which his beloved has for him, would enable her to perceive the difference, however, slight it may be.

Fresco—a large-scale painter who paints on plastered walls. *Curbs the liberal hand*—paints with self restraint *Subservient proudly*—proudly subordinates his art to the service of his beloved. *Cramps his spirit*—curbs his natural talent for large-scale painting. *Missal-marge*—margin of the prayer-book.

He who blows through bronze—plays loud, martial music on an instrument of brass. *May breathe through silver*—may play tender music on a silver flute *Serenade*—evening song sung at a lady's window to soothe her sleep. *Slumberous*—drowsy ; inclined to sleep. *As I do*—in a changed style and manner.

Stanza XV

Addressing his beloved wife, the poet says that in the present volume of poems (*Men and Women*) he has brought together fifty men and women Some of them are living characters, others are dead, and still others are imaginary characters. He has entered into each of them, and made them speak, and the speech of each of them, constitutes a poem. It is in this way, by using fifty different men and women as his agents, he has composed the fifty dramatic monologues contained in the present collection. He is used to a dramatic manner of expression, and he finds it very difficult to talk directly of his own joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, beliefs and disbeliefs. The subjective way of expression is not usual with him, and hence he finds it difficult to write a personal poem like the present one, which is the expression of his own love and which is meant for the eyes of his beloved wife alone, while the other poems are meant for the people at large. In the other poems, he has spoken through the mouth of characters like Karshish. Cleon, Norbert, Lippo, Roland, Andrea, and many others, but in the present poem he speaks in his own proper person, and expresses his own personal feelings. What he wants to tell her in this poem can be expressed in a single sentence. He wants to tell her simply that this volume of fifty poems is dedicated to her, and she should accept it as an offering of love. The love of his heart is already with her, and so now the product of his intellect must also belong to her. His expression may be poor, says the poet, modestly, but this is the only way in which he can express himself.

Fashioned by my fancy—creatures of his imagination. *Use their service*—used them as his instruments or mediums of expression. *Hardly shall I tell*—used to a dramatic mode of expression, the poet finds it difficult to speak in his own proper person.

I am mine and yours—the present poem *One Word More* is a subjective poem. It is an expression of personal feelings. So it belongs to the poet, and his beloved. The other poems are meant for the general public.

Though the fruit......sentence—what he wants to tell her in this lyric, can be easily expressed in one sentence only.

Stanza XVI

The poet's expression may be poor, and he may fail to express adequately his love of her. But still he is sure that his beloved understands his real self and knows the various aspects of his personality. The Moon is the same in London as it was Florence, despite its varying phases and changing forms. The Moon's face undergoes three variations, i.e. it is new-born, then it waxes full, and then finally it wanes and declines. When recently they were in Florence, it was a thin crescent, not broader than a hair. It shone in a delicate, thin curve in the colourful Italian sky over the city of Fiesole, in the neighbourhood of Florence. Then it waxed rounder and rounder and they saw it shining brightly, like a lamp, among the cypress groves of the church of Samminiato in Florence. It became round and full and the nightingales sang songs in praise of its beauty. Now that they are in London, they find that the appearance of the Moon has changed once again. It has waned and become thin, as it was in its first phase. It has become poor, *i.e.* it has lost its former brightness. Indeed, it is almost difficult to recognise and greet it as the same old moon. It now passes hurriedly over the houses of London, and is miserly in the distribution of its silvery light. It has grown old, dejected, and beggerly. It is glad when it sets and its old age comes to an end. But it is essentially the same Moon. In the same way, his real nature, his love of her, remains unchanged, whether he speaks to her in his own person, or through a number of assumed characters. Whatever the appearance and manner, the reality remains the same, and he is sure that she would always recognize his real self.

Here in London—the Brownings returned to London from Florence in 1855, for the publication of *Men and Women*. *Thrice-transfigured*—the Moon has three varying phases: the new crescent Moon, the full Moon, and the waning Moon.

Curving—shining in the form of a crescent. *Imbrued with colour*—the colourful Italian sky.

Full she flared it—The Moon became full and shone brilliantly. *Lamping*—shining like a lamp. *Samminiato*—the name of a church of Florence. *Applauded*—sang songs in its praise.

Impoverished—deprived of her former brightness. *Hard to greet*—difficult to recognise as the same old Moon. *Traverses*—moves over. *Unhandsome*—indecent ; improper. *Thrift*—economy. *Silver*—silvery moonlight.

Stanza XVII

People who see the Moon daily do not find anything remarkable about it. To them, the Moon is a commonplace sight. The poet imagines, and his quaint fancy is justified by mythology, that the Moon has fallen in love with a mortal, as Diana, the moon-goddess in classical mythology, actually fell in love with a shepherd, Endymion. If the Moon were in love, she would use all her charms to attract the mortal she loved. She would show to him a new side of her face, a side which has not been seen by herdsman, huntsman, navigators, and astronomers like Zoroaster and Galileo. This side was not seen even by Homer, the great epic poet, who wrote a hymn to the Moon-goddess, and by Keats who celebrated the love of the Moon-goddess in his poem *Endymion*. The mortal lover of the Moon would be wonder-struck as she appears in the sky, and he sees her turn round and open her other face to him, that side which has never before been visible to man. The poet speculates regarding the other side of the Moon. Does the reverse side of the Moon look like a dangerous iceberg which causes a ship to break into pieces by striking against it ? The poet likens the iceberg to a huge sea-animal with its icy crags projecting forth like teeth. Then the poet imagines that perhaps the other side of the Moon would be like a beautiful pavement studded with sapphires, just as she appeared to Moses, when he ascended Mount Sinai with his companions Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. Browning now uses the exact words used in *the Bible*, and says that when God appeared to Moses, it seemed to him that He was standing on a pavement of sapphires, clear and bright like heaven itself.

The poet's argument is that all in love behave differently, and reveal an aspect of their personality different from their usual aspect. Even the Moon is no exception to this general rule.

Mythos—Mythology. *Steersman*—navigators. *Blank*—unseen ; unknown. .*Terrace*—the turret from which Zoroaster, the founder of the Parsee religion, used to watch the stars.

Portent—dangerous. *Founders*—shatters ; wrecks. *Hungry with ......crystals*—the poet likens the iceberg to a sea-beast with projecting teeth of ice. *Aaron, Nadab, etc.*—they were the companions of Moses when he climbed Mount Sinai where God appeared to him in a flame of lightning. *Paved-work of sapphire*—a pavement studded with sapphires. *Like the bodied heaven*—as if it were heaven itself.

Stanza XVIII

None knows what the other side of the Moon is like. None has ever seen it, though everybody is sure that the Moon has another side,

another face, as well. None can be definite how the other side of the Moon looks. But this much is certain that the other side of the Moon is different from that side of the Moon which they have observed waxing and waning in Florence and London. They should be grateful to God that He has blessed even the meanest of creatures with two aspects to his soul—one which he shows to the world at large, and the other which he shows to his beloved alone. The aspect which is shown to the world is conventional and artificial, the aspect which is shown to the beloved is real.

Impoverished—deprived of its brightness.

Stanza XIX

The poet has said of himself, that he, too, like all others, has two aspects to his personality. But as a matter of fact he has been thinking of her all the time. She, too, has two sides to her personality. For the world at large she is a poet. The world regards her only as a poet, the Moon of poets, *i.e.* the best and the most beautiful of poets. But it is only one aspect of her personality. The other side of her personality is revealed only to the poet, who loves her. With the world he admires her as a poet, but as a lover he admires her for the other aspects of her nature which are not observed and known by the world. The poet likens her to the Moon. Just as the Moon has an unknown reverse side, full of silvery white places as well as dark—depths unimagined by man, similarly, her personality, too, has hidden depths and exquisite facets, in the presence of which he is struck dumb with wonder, and blesses himself in silence.

Dubious twilight—come out on the other side, the side of her personality which is shadowed in darkness from the eyes of the world. The metaphor is taken from a navigator (a space man) circling the Moon and reaching the other, hidden side of her. *The novel*—new; never observed before. *Darks*—depths.

Stanza XX

Rafael painted beautiful portraits of Virgin Mary and the world praises and honours him for these portraits. Dante wrote the dreadful scenes of the *Inferno*, and the world honours him for those scenes. But Rafael wrote sonnets for his beloved, and he, Browning, too, has penned a poem (*One Word More*) in a manner and style different from his usual one, for his beloved wife alone. Dante painted a picture of an angel—for the eyes of his beloved, Beatrice, alone, and he, too, has the picture of an angel painted on his heart. He always carries in his heart the picture of his wife, who is his angel. Like all artists, he has revealed the best of him, only to his beloved wife; to her alone has he spoken directly in his own person, and not through an assumed character.

23

The Statue and the Bust

(*a*) THE POEM

THERE's a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do our townsmen tell

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the East
Asked, 'Who rides by with the royal air ?'

The bridesmaids' prattle around her ceased ;
She leaned forth, one on either hand ;
They say how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand—
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, 'The Great-Duke Ferdinand'.

That self same instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—'Who is she ?'
—'A bride the Riccardi brings home to-day.'

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure—
Carved like the heart of a coal-black tree.

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure—
And vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man,—
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can ;
She looked at him, as one who awakes :
The past was a sleep, and her life began.

(*Stanza 1-10*)

Now, love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite!

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued—

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bedchamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalk repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain wind w facing the East,
She could watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

'Freely I choose too,' said the bride—
'Your window and its world suffice,'
Replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

'If I spend the night with that devil twice,
May his window serve as my loop of hell
Whence a damned soul looks on paradise!

'I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

''Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,
And I save my soul—but not to-morrow'—

(*Stanza 11-25*)

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)
'My father tarries to bless my state :
I must keep it one day more for him.

'Is one day more so long to wait ?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know ;
We shall see each other, sure as fate.'

She turned on her side and slept. Just so !
So we resolve on a thing and sleep :
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, 'Dear or cheap
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
To body or soul, I will drain it deep.'

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled ''Twas a very funeral,
Your lady will think, this feast of ours,—
A shame to efface, whate'er befall !

'What if we break from the Arno bowers,
And try if Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers ?'

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, 'Too much favour for me so mean !

'But, alas ! my lady leaves the South ;
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth :

'Nor a way exists, the wise opine,
If she quits her palace twice this year,
To avert the flower of life's decline.'

Quoth the Duke, 'A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring :
Be our feast to-night as usual here !'

And then to himself—'Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool—
Or I am the fool, and thou art the king !

'Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—
For to-night the Envoy arrives from France
Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

'I need thee still and might miss perchance,
To-day is not wholly lost, beside,
With its hope of my lady's countenance :

'For I ride—what should I do but ride ?
And passing her palace, if I list,
May glance at its window—well betide !'

(*Stanza 26-40*)

So said, so done : nor the lady missed
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,
No morrow's sun should arise and set
And leave them as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one day more
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth :
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By store of fruits that supplant the rose :
The world and its ways have a certain worth :

And to press a point while these oppose
Were simple policy ; better wait :
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

Meantime, worse fate than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and pass and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate !

And she—she watched the square like a book
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook :

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

So weeks grew months, years ; gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from their youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream ;

Which hovered as dreams do, still above :
But who can take a dream for a truth ?
Or, hide our eyes from the next remove !

One day, as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked,—
And wondered who the woman was,
Hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

Fronting her silent in the glass—
'Summon here,' she suddenly said,
'Before the rest of my old self pass,

(*Stanza 41-55*)

'Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
Who fashions the clay no love will change,
And fixes a beauty never to fade.

'Let Robbia's craft so apt and strange
Arrest the remains of young and fair,
And rivet them while the seasons range.

'Make me a face on the window there,
Waiting as ever, mute the while,
My love to pass below in the square!

'And let me think that it may beguile
Dreary days which the dead must spend
Down in their darkness under the aisle,

'To say, "What matters it at the end?
I did no more while may heart was warm
Than does that image, my pale-faced friend."

'Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm—

'Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow.'

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine,
With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,
Was set where now is the empty shrine—

(And, leaning out of a bright blue space,
As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face—

Eyeing ever, with earnest eye
And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever is passing by—)

The Duke had sighed like the simplest wretch
In Florence, 'Youth—my dream escapes!
Will its record stay?' And he bade them fetch

Some subtle moulder of brazen shapes—
'Can the soul, the will, die out of a man
Ere his body find the grave that gapes?

'John of Douay shall effect my plan,
Set me on horseback here aloft,
Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,

'In the very square I have crossed so oft:
That men may admire, when future suns
Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

'While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze—
Admire and say, "When he was alive
How he would take his pleasure once!"

(*Stanza 56-70*)

'And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen the while, and laugh in my tomb
At idleness which aspires to strive.'

* * *

So ! While these wait the trump of doom.
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room ?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of his,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way thro' the world to this.

I hear you reproach, 'But delay was best,
For their end was a crime.'—Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view !

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf ?
Where a button goes, 'twere an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham :
As well the counter as coin, I submit.
When your table's a hat, and your prize a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it.

If you choose to play !—is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will !

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin :
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say,
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive you ? *De te, fabula* !

(*Stanza 71-83*)

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

Publication of the Poem : Its Theme

The Statue and the Bust is a dramatic romance which was first published in the volume of Browning's poems entitled *Men and Women.* It narrates the story of a Duke and a lady who loved each other, but who failed to act, and owing to their inaction could not get the object on which their heart was set. "*The poem is one of Browning's most provocative analysis of failure*", and its philosophy is bold and challenging. It is based on a legend of Florence, Italy, which has been summarised by **Mrs Orr** thus : "In the *piazza of the SS. Annunziata* at Florence is an equestrian statue of the Grand Duke Ferdinand the First, representing him as riding away from the church, with his head turned in the direction of the Riccardi Palace, which occupies one corner of the square. Tradition asserts that he loved a lady whom her husband's jealousy kept a prisoner there; and that he avenged his love by placing himself in effigy where his glance could always dwell upon her." The Riccardi Palace in Florence is the scene of the story.

Critical Summary

The poet has told the story in a direct straight-forward manner. A lady who is just to be married to the head of the Riccardi family notices a man who rides past her window with a "royal air". The bridesmaids whisper to her that he is the great Duke Ferdinand. The Duke, in his turn, looks up towards the bride. As he looked at the lady and she at him, her past was asleep—her life began that day only.

That night there was a feast *in honour of the bride,* and the Grand Duke was present. The lovers stood face to face a minute. In accordance with the courtly custom of the time, the Duke was privileged to kiss the bride. Whether a word was spoken or not cannot be said. The husband, who stood by, however, saw or heard something which told him of their secret; and when, at night, he led his bride to her chamber, he told her calmly that the door which was then shut on her would remain closed till her body should be taken thence for burial. She could watch the world from the window, which faced the east, but could never more pass the door. The bride as calmly assented.

"*Your window and its world suffice,*"

she said. It would be easy, she thought, to fly to the Duke, who loved her : it would only be necessary to disguise herself as a page, in order to be united with her lover. She reflected, however, that next day her father was to bless her new condition, and so she must tarry for a day. She consoled herself with the reflection that she

would certainly see the Duke ride past. And so she turned on her side and went to sleep.

That night the Duke also resolved to ruin body and soul, if need be, for the sake of this beautiful lady ; and on the morrow he invited the bridegroom, whose duties at court brought him into his presence, that he, with his wife, should visit him *at his country seat at Petraja.* The bridegroom quietly declined the invitation, saying that the state of his lady's health did not permit her to quit the palace, the wind from the Appennines being particularly dangerous for her. The Duke was foiled in his plan ; but consoled himself with the thought that it should not be long before he met the bride again, yet he must wait a night, for the envoy from France was to visit him. He too reflects that he shall see the lady as he rides past her palace. They saw each other, and each resolved that next day they would take the final plunge; but next day and the next passed, and the project of union was courtantly postponed. Weeks grew months, years passed by, till age crept on, and each *perceived that they had beeu dreaming.*

One day the lady saw in her mirror that her beauty was fading : her hair was tinged with grey, her mouth was puckered, and she was haggard-cheeked ; and as she beheld herself in her glass she *bade her servants call a famous sculptor to fix the remains of her beauty, so that it should no more fade. Della Robbia* must make her a face on her window, waiting, as ever, to watch her lover pass in the square below. But long before the artist's work was finished and the bust in its place, the Duke realised that his own youth had vanished ; and he too set *John of Douay* to make an equestrian statue of him, and to place it in the square he had crossed so often, so that men should admire him when he was dead. This statue looks straight at one of the windows of the Riccardi palace : the attitude suggests love for the lady and contempt for her husband.

The Moral

In the end, the poet reflects on the failure of the spirits of these two awaiting the Last Judgment. Do they reflect on the greatness of the gift of life, how they had seen the proper object of their lives and yet had missed it ? "*But,*" the poet hears us object, "*their end was a crime, and delay was best.*" The test, however, of our use of life can be as well made through a crime as through a virtue. A game can be played without money : where a button answers, it would be vain to use a sovereign. Whether we play with counters or coins, we must do our best to win :

If you choose to play!—is my principle,
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will.

These people as surely lost their counter as if it were lawful coin.

Its Criticism

Thus in the poem Browning praises action and effort even if it is for a sinful, unworthy purpose. In his eyes inaction and irresolution are the worst sins. This philosophy has come in for a good deal of criticism. **Berdoe** *admirably* summarises the whole position. He writes, "So far as society was concerned the lady and the Duke did well : so far as their own souls were concerned they undoubtedly did ill. The Duke would have been more manly and the woman truer to her human instincts, if he and she had let love have its way. Both dwarfed and withered their souls by looking and longing and pining for what they had not courage to grasp. The sin in each case was as great in the sight of God. It was simply prudence and conventionality which restrained the lovers; and these things count for nothing with the poet-psychologist. But conventionality counts for a great deal in our conduct of life. It may have been the crowning disaster to miss life for the man and the woman : if so, it was a sacrifice justly due to human society. If every woman flew to the arms of the man whom she liked better than her own husband, and if every governor of a city felt himself at liberty to steal another man's wife merely to complete and perfact the circle of his own delights, society would soon be thrown back into barbarism."

Language and Diction

The language of the poem is simple and easy to understand. There is no obscurity in the poem It is entirely free from the oddities and eccentricities which make him such a difficult poet As usual, Browning has used a number of telling images to convey his point home to his readers. For example, before the Duke has seen the lady and fallen in love with her, he is, "*empty and fine like a swordless sheath*" After he has seen the lady and fallen in love he is, "*a blade for a Knight's emprize.*" Equally vivid is the following :

> *And she—she watched the square like a book,*
> *Holding one picture and only one,*
> *Which daily to find she undertook.*

Similarly, the moral of the poem has been illustrated by the use of an analogy borrowed from the gambling table.

Versification

The metre of the poem is *terza rima*, making use of short lines, and having such a pause at the end of each stanza as there is generally in *Dante's Divine Comedy*. It is a difficult metre to handle, but Browning has handled it with great skill

(c) CRITICAL NOTES, COMMENTS, EXPLANTIONS, ETC.

Stanza 1—4

There is a palace—the reference is to the palace of the Riccardi in Florence. It was here that the heroine of the story was kept a sa

virtual prisoner by her husband. *Riccardi* is the name of a noble family of Florence. The Riccardi in question was the head of the family at the time.

The Statue—The statue showing Duke Ferdinand I of Florence riding a horse is still to be seen in the 'square' of the city. The Duke belonged to the famous *Medici* family. *The Square*—the reference is to *Piazza Della Annunziata* in Florence.

The story of both—the story of the love of the Duke Ferdinand whose statue is to be seen in the square, and of the lady who was imprisoned in the palace.

The bridesmaids—the lady was to be married that very day. Hence she stood at the window surrounded by the bridesmaids, *i.e.* ladies who were to assist her to the Church. *Prattle*—chatter ; idle talk.

They saw how......increased—the lady had fallen in love at first sight with Duke Fredrick who was riding by. Hence the flush on her face.

They felt......expand—her heart was palpitating violently showing her agitation.

In a breath—at one and the same time.

Stanza 5—8

That selfsame instant—at that very moment.

In his idle way—in his usual leisurely manner.

Empty and fine......sheath—a beautiful simile used to convey an idea of the Duke's inner emptiness and his external grace and fascination. *Sheath*—a cover for keeping a sword.

Who is she ?—the Duke chanced to look at the bride standing at the window of her palace.

A bride the......today—the friend with the Duke told him that Riccardi was to marry the lady that very day.

And vainly sought......eyes—the lady tried to conceal her love, but it was all in vain. Her black eyes and her face revealed her secret.

Stanza 9—11

Emprise—enterprise. *A blade*— a sword. *And to, a blade...... of a man*—love transformed the Duke. From an empty man, empty like the sheath of a sword, he now became brave and wise, like a sword fit for the use of a Knight.

As one who awakes—love stirred the lady to a new life and activity.

Her life began—It was the beginning of a new life for her.

Now love so ordered......that selfsame night—the god of love so arranged matters that the lovers were able to meet at a feast that very night. It was the marriage-feast given by the Riccardi in honour of his marriage, and Duke Ferdinand was invited to it.

The pile—the palace. *Which the mighty shadow makes*—which casts a large shadow. *The pile......makes*—the palace of the Riccardi which partly overshadows the Via Larga. (Riccardi palace was constructed by the Medici, but was later on purchased by the Riccardis).

Stanza 12—16

For Via Larga is......and his cursed son—The Via Larga, now known as the Via Cavour, is partly overshadowed by the palace of the Medici. The over-shadowing of the Via Larga is symbolic of the murder, or the overthrow, of the first Florentine Republic. Cosimo di Medici and his grandson Lorenzo, the Magnificent, raised themselves to the position of absolute rulers of Florence and, in destroying the liberties of the Republic, committed a crime. The action of these two men was a wrong done not only to the people of Florence but also to God.

His multitude—his numerous attendants and followers.

While the bridegroom......the floor—as Duke Ferdinand was the ruler of Florence, the Riccardi (the bridegroom) bent low before him out of respect.

Subdued—defeated ; conquered.

As the courtly......of Yore—as was the custom in the past in those days of Chivalry and Knight-errantry. *Of Yore*—of the past.

Stanza 17—19

At day's brink—late in the night.

A taper blink—the dim light of a candle.

That her lot was cast—that her fate was decided.

That the door she......on her—that never again in life would she be allowed to go out of the room.

Till the final......repassed—till her death, when her dead body would be carried out of the room.

Catafalk—Hearse : Coffin.

Stanza 20—27

She would watch—she would get a glimpse of the stir and activity of the outside world.

Convent's chronicler—like a person living in a convent and recording the passing of events.

And a feast......beside—at the feast the Duke, her lover, may be present and so the feast may result in her elopement with him.

He, of many evils......least—the feast and the confinement of the lady within her room were both evils. He chose the lesser of the two evils, *i.e.* he decided that she should remain confined to her room.

Its would suffice—the glimpse of the outside world which I would get through your window are sufficient for me.

That devil—her husband, who had passed such a stern judgment on her.

Twice—another night. She was so hopeful that before the second night she would be able to escape with her lover.

Loop of Hell—the opening in Hell through which.

Ere I count another ave-bell—befor the next bell calling the devout to prayer.

Horse-boy—ostler. *Trim*—manner.

To bless my state—to bless me as a wife.

I must keep it one day more for him—for his sake I must stay as the wife of this man for one day more.

Stanza 28—29

Dear and Cheap—whether the love of this lady costs me dear or not.

This cup of bliss—the love of this lady, the source of such bliss for the lover.

I will drain it deep—I will drink it to the full. I will enjoy the pleasures of her love at all costs.

Stanza 30—32

Beckoned—called. *The bridegroom*—The Riccardi, the husband of his beloved.

Close on call—he was near at hand, so that he may be called whenever required. *Alcove*—bedroom.

A very funeral—dull and gloomy.

A shame to......befall—whatever may happen, her impression that we cannot give a better feast must be removed. It is a shame that she should have such a poor opinion about our feast.

Arno—a river which flows through Florence. *Bower*—a residence on the banks of the river Arno. *Break*—leave for sometime.

Petraja—the residence of the Duke on the outskirts of Florence.

Cure last night's fault—remove the poor impression created by the last night's party. *This morning's flowers*—the merry-making of this day.

Stanza 33—35

Not a thought......quiet mouth—There was no sign of worry on his face.

Too much favour......mean—it is very kind of you to have so much regard for a humble person like myself.

The Apennine—the mountains in whose valley Florence is situated.

Is a menace......youth—she does not keep good health, and the wind coming from the mountains is a danger to her health.

The wise opine—this is the opinion of the learned doctors.

To avert......decline—her health would suffer and her life may come to an end. *To avert*—to avoid.

Stanza 36—30

A sage—wise.

Or I am the......the king—If I do not enjoy her this night, then I am a fool and you will be the King. The Duke is so sure of his success that he considers failure as impossible as his being the fool and the Riccardi's being the King of Florence.

Passion—love. *The Envoy......France*—the French ambassador would be here to-night.

Whose heart......my tool—the Duke tends to use Riccardi as a tool to make the French ambassador open his lips and reveal his secrets.

I need thee......perchance—He needed the Riccardi for one night more and, therefore, he would do nothing to lose him. His love will have to wait for one day more.

With its hope......countenance—the Duke consoles himself with the thought that he would pass by her window and have a look at her face.

If I list—If I so desire.

Well betide—it is just possible.

Stanza 41—43

The ardent brow—the bright face of the Duke, shining brightly with his love.

Be sure that each......them now—each day both the Duke and the lady vowed that the next day there certainly would be a change in their lives. The next day will not leave then as they are now ; they would certainly be with each other the next day.

Still fresh cause—each day some new difficulty arose, and they decided to wait for one day more.

Leaped over the parapet—made a plunge ; took the hold step of elopement, and thus putting an end to their misery.

Stanza 44—47

They thought......infallibly—they were sure that they would succeed, for true love never fails.

But not in......earth—but they must not be rash ; they must wait for a favourable opportunity ; they must not invite the wrath of man and God by acting rashly.

The rose would......passed away—Just as a rose blooms only when the storm has passed away, in the same way their love would flower and they would succeed only when they get a favourable opportunity.

They could profit in—they should make use of ; they should enjoy.

In winter's dearth—whatever meagre pleasure are provided by winter.

Meantime they could......dearth—as long as they cannot elope and enjoy each others company, they should be content with looking at each other from a distance.

The world and......certain worth—they must show due consideration to the ways and conventions of the world. They have their own value, for without them civilised life is not possible. Thus, after all, it is a wrong to elope with anothers wife.

These—circumstances. *Simple*—foolish.

And to press a point......policy—it would be foolish to act in haste when the circumstances are not favourable. They should wait for sometime more. (In this way the decision to elope was postponed day after day).

We lose no......friend—There is no harm in waiting for a little while more.

Stanza 48—50

Worse fates than a lover's fate—the Duke consoled himself with the fact that there are lovers who do not even enjoy the pleasure of looking at their lady's face once a day. He was more lucky, at least, in this respect.

The grate—the iron bars of the window.

Like a book—attentively, as if reading a book.

Holding one......only—the book, as far as she was concerned, had only picture, the picture of her lover, the Duke. She looked only for him and for none else.

When the picture......was done—the Duke was the picture. When he had passed by, the book was closed, *i.e.* she turned away from the window. *To scheme of tearing......next*—at night she would make imaginary plans as to how she would make the Duke her own the next day.

Stanza 51—52

Gleam by gleam—gradually ; one glory after another. The charm of love youth and beauty gradually passed away with the passing of time.

They had dreamed a dream—their love was a mere dream ; they had failed to transform it into reality.

Which hovered......above—though they had realised that their love was a mere dream, still they continued to dream of it.

Hide our eyes......remove—they could not for ever shut their eyes to reality, *i.e.* the decay of youth and beauty.

Stanza 53—62

Saw her youth depart—saw in the mirror that her beauty was gone.

The silver thread—gray hair.

The Serpent's tooth—Time which destroys everything.

Puckered—withered ; wrinkled.

Peaked—pointed ; thin and not round as previously.

Who the woman was—*i.e.* she was surprised at her own image in the mirror. Her face had grown so wrinkled and sunken.

My old self—my youthful beauty.

The carver—the sculptor ; the artist who makes statues.

Who fashions the clay—who makes statues out of clay.

Fixes a beauty—makes immortal the beauty of a person. *Never to fade*—so that it never decays.

Robbia's craft—Della Robbia was a great artist of Florence. Here the reference is to the kind of work done by Robbia, and not the artist himself who died in 1566. His art was terra-cotta covered with enamel.

So apt and strange—so wonderful.

Arrest the......fair—capture for ever (through his art) whatever remains of my youth and beauty.

Rivet them—fix them up ; make them immortal. *While the seasons range*—while there is yet time.

Mute the while—silent all the time.

It may beguile—the thought will help to pass ; the thought will be a source of consolation.

Under the aisle—The vault under the church used for burrying the dead.

I did no more......that image—There is no difference between the living and the dead, if in life one does not act and make efforts to get one's object of life.

That image—her face reflected in the mirror. It is also referred t o as, "my pale-faced friend".

. *The heaven of hair*—beautiful, luxuriant hair.

The blood......arm—the worm blood of youth flowing in the veins.

Unless we turn......end divine—in imaginations the world can turn dreams into reality. Life is useless, if we do not use it to attain our life's objects, and try to turn our dreams into reality.

I trow—I know.

Stanza 63—71

But long ere......fine—but long before work on the statue of the lady was completed, and the statue placed properly at the window.

At its breathless stretch—watching out of the window in suspense with stretched neck.

Will its record stay—can the dream I dreamed of love be immortalised ? Can it be given a permanent form ?

Some subtle...shapes—a skilled artist who made statues out of brass. *Subtle*—skilled. *Moulder*—maker. *Brazen-shapes*—statues of brass.

The soul, the will, etc.—the desires of a man ; his love.

Ere his body...the gapes—before he dies and is burried in his grave.

John of Douay—a celebrated sculptor of Italy.

Shall effect my plan—shall make the statue I desire, and thus immortalise my love. It is through the statue that the memory of my love will remain, even after I die.

Set me on...Alive—make a statue of me on horse back, exactly as I used to ride in life.

Crafty—skiful.

Stay brave in bronze—are immortalised by the statue. *How he would take his pleasure once*—how he used to ride to look at his love once a day.

And it shall go hard...the while—the Duke imagines that while he is in his grave, his ghost will listen to the admiring remarks of the people and laugh at them.

At idleness which aspires to strive—in life he remained inactive and did nothing to get the lady he aspired to. Aspirations are useless unless we make active efforts to realise them. A lover should act boldly, and not remain hesitating as did the Duke in his life. He did nothing admirable in life. Therefore, when his ghost would hear people praising him, it would simply laugh at their folly.

Stanza 72-75

The trump—The trumpet ; call. *These wait the...doom*—they remain in their grave waiting for the day of Judgment when they will have to appear before God.

Their narrow rooms—their respective graves.

Six steps out of the chapel yonder—Quite near to the Church of the Santissima Annunziata, on the north-east side of the square which is the scene of the story.

Chivalry—*i.e.* the soldier saints of God referred to in the next time.

Row on row—in large numbers.

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—It is God's law that one should try his best to achieve the object of one's desire, object on which one's bliss depends.

Stanza 76-83

I hear you reproach—Browning says that he knows he would be criticised for his views.

For their end was crime—it was good that the lovers did not act, for their love was immoral and sinful.

To serve for a test—the test of the usefulness of a life lies in effort. The effort may be for something regarded as a crime by the world, but all the same it is as good a test as the effort for something regarded virtuous. It is the effort, the upward striving, which matters in Browning's philosophy ; inaction is the worst sin.

Sufficient to vindicate itself—some virtuous end or object for which there is sufficient justification.

And prove...view—which is obviously virtuous and noble.

Pelf—money. *Must a game...of pelf*—should one gamble only for the sake of money, and not for the game itself ?

Goes—can serve the purpose. *Epigram*—mere folly. Browning's use of the word in this sense is entirely individual and personal.

To offer the...Guelph—to pay real, genuine money with the stamp of the king or Queen on it.

The stamp of the very Guelph—a coin stamped with the image of the Queen of the Guelph dynasty which ruled over England from 1714-1914.

Beyond—more than.

Counter—round metal disks used in gambling, instead of money.

When your table is a hat—the conditions in which the game is played do not matter. It does not matter if instead of a table, a hat is used.

A dram— a farthing ; something un-important.

Must a game be...your prize a dram—These lines constitute the moral of the story. If you insist on tendering coin where a button would pass, your action, if not mere folly, is an "epigrammatic" way of indicating your disdain for money, or your low valuation of the king's stamp. The implication is that the elementary question whether cowardice and irresolution are unmanly does not depend on the question whether they happen to be exhibited in face of a moral decision or an immoral one. To invoke the moral law of the particular case to decide this question is to pay a coin instead of a button —which is not honouring the coin.

The conditions under which the game is played and the reward at the end of it are not to be considered in any judgment on the player. The fact that the thing desired by the Duke and the Lady was iniquitous does not invalidate it as a test. In their test they failed for lack of initiative and resolve.

Stake your counter as boldly—always play the game of life boldly, always act and strive even if your aim is considered as sinful by the world.

Every whit—in every way

Venture as warily—act as carefully.

Let a man......uttermost—a man should put in his best efforts.

Set—settled ; fixed. *For his life's set prize*—for the object of one's desire.

Each frustrated spirit—the frustrated spirits of the Duke and the lady.

The unlit lamp and the ungirt loin—lack of initiative and resolve, the worst sins in the eyes of Browning. His is a philosophy of action.

We issue Join—we challenge you to prove that we are wrong..

De te, fabule—"The story applies to you" **(T.S. Young)**

24

Evelyn Hope

I

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead !
    Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed :
    She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass ;
    Little has yet been changed, I think :
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
    Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

II

Sixteen years old when she died !
    Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name ;
It was not her time to love ; beside,
    Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
    And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—
    And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope ?
    What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
    Made you of spirit, fire and dew—
And, just because I was thrice as old
    And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was naught to each, must I be told ?
    We were fellow mortals, nought beside ?

IV

No, indeed ! for God above
    Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love :
    I claim you still, for my own love's sake !
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
    Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few :
Much is to learn, much to forget
    Ere the time be come for taking you.

V

But the time will come,—at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men.
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

VII

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while.
My heart seemed full as it could hold;
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep:
See, I shut it inside the sweet, cold hand!
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

A Dramatic Monlogue

Evelyn Hope, one of the most popular love lyrics of Browning, was first published in *Men and Women* in 1855. It is a dramatic monlogue. The speaker, the central personage, is not the poet, but an imagined character, and it is he who speaks throughout. The listener may be some friend who has come with the middle-aged lover to the room, where Evelyn Hope lies dead. The setting is provided by Evelyn Hope's room.

Critical Summary

The middle-aged lover loved Evelyn Hope passionately and devotedly. But he did not tell her of his love as long as she lived.

It would have been highly improper for him to do so, for Evelyn Hope was a mere child, and he was a middle-aged man, "thrice as old". However, when she dies at the tender age of sixteen, he comes to her room and pours out his heart in this poignant and moving lyric.

Beautiful Evelyn Hope, the object of his silent devotion, is dead and he sits and watches by her bed-side for an hour. The room is dark as the shutters have been closed, and no ray of light enters there except through, "the hinges Chink." The arrangements in the room have not been disturbed so far. Her book-shelf and her bed are still at their usual places. A little geranium which she had plucked and placed in a glass vase, has began to fade and die out, as if in grief for the dead Evelyn Hope. This is a fine instance of *pathetic fallacy*, the figure of speech in which human emotions are attributed to inanimate objects. She died at the tender age of sixteen, and most probably she had not even heard the name of her devoted, middle-aged lover. The lover did never speak out to her of his love, for she was a mere child and it would have been highly improper and indecent for him to have done so. She was young and healthy full of hopes and aspirations. She was active and energetic. She was a pure soul whom God loved and whom He called away from this world so early in life. Now she is dead. Her body is wrapped in her shroud, and only her "sweet white brow" is to be seen.

But the lover does not despair. There is no doubt that there was a wide difference between his life and hers. She was pure and innocent, fortunate and lucky. She was a mere child in years, while he was middle aged. He still lives, while she lies dead before him. But this does not mean that there was nothing in common between them, that he was nothing to her, and she was nothing to him. The lover does not agree with those who hold such views. His love is true and sincere, and, therefore, he is quite sure that they would meet in some future life. It is God who creates love in the human heart, and if the love is true, He surely grants it :

> *...for God above*
> *Is great to grant, as mighty to make*
> *And creates the love to reward the love.*

His love is true and sincere, and, therefore, he is sure to meet his beloved one day or the other. He may have to live through many other lives, and thus gain much experience and wisdom. He may have to perfect himself in this way before he is united with his beloved. But the time will come at last when he will be united with his beloved Evelyn Hope. Then he would explain to her how passionately and devotedly he had loved her in this present life on this earth. He would then tell her how passionately he loved her for her beautiful soul and her many physical charms, such as her amber hair and her red mouth. He might have lived through many lives,

since he loved her in this world, and he may have forgotten many things, but he never forgot her. She has always lived in his soul.

His heart is full to the brim with love of her. There was always ample room in his heart for her, "frank young smile", her "red young mouth", and her, "hair's young gold". In the end, the lover bids her farewell, at least as far as this earthly existence is concerned. He places in her hand a petal of the geranium flower. This petal is the symbol of their love. He is confident that when she wakes up in the other world, she would remember and understand. The geraniumpetal would tell her of the silent devotion of her lover who placed it in her hands.

As a Love Poem

The lyric ranks very highlin the love-poetry of Browning. It is a poem of abnormal love. It is unusual for a middle-aged man of forty-eight years to love a mere child of sixteen, but it is such a love which forms the theme of this lyric. The love is also unusual, because the lover does never tell his beloved of his passion, as long as she lives. He is conscious of the fact that to talk of love to a mere child would be indecent and improper. The poem also brings out Browning's philosophy of love. As a love-poet, Browning is highly optimistic. He is of the view that true love can never be futile and vain. True lovers are sure to meet, if not in this life, at least in lives to come. He has full faith in the mercy of God. God is great, He creates love only to reward it. Therefore, he is optimistic about a true lover's ultimate union with his beloved.

Philosophy

Besides being an expression of Browning's optimism, the poem also brings out the poet's belief in the immortality of the human soul. The body may die, but the soul lives on. The soul is born again and has many lives. It traverses through worlds not a few, learns much and forgets much. It is by living through many lives that man acquires experience, knowledge and wisdom, and ultimately reaches perfection. Evelyn's lover hopes to become perfect, and so worthy of of her, in this way.

The Note of Pathos

It is a love-poem as well as a poem of mourning. It is pathetic and heart-touching. The death of the child of tender years, and the lovers' expression of grief at her death, touch the heart of the readers and move them to pity and sympathy. The note of pathos is struck in the very first line, "*Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead*", and is maintained upto the very end. The lover's grief at the death of his beloved is intensified by the fact that the 'geranium-flower' shares it and is, "*Beginning to die too, in the glass*". Evelyn Hope was so youthful and active, and so full of hope and aspirations, but now alas : "*the sweet white brow is all of her.*"

Conclusion

The poem is also remarkable for its simplicity. The language used is extremely simple and easy to understand. There is hardly any difficult word in the whole poem. It is entirely free from that eccentricity and obscurity which is such a marked feature of Browning's poetry. At least one line from it, "God creates the love to reward the love", is often quoted.

The lyric, in short, represents Browning at his very best.

Stanza 1

The glass —the glass vase for keeping flowers. *Hinges Chink*—the narrow opening or slit at the sides of the door.

Stanza 2

It was not her time to love—she was too young for love. She was a mere child. *Astir*—active. *Beckoned*—called. *Unawares*—unexpectedly. *And the sweet...of her*—the rest of the body is covered in the winding sheet. Only her white face is to be seen.

Stanza 3

The good stars...horoscope—she was born at an auspicious moment. So she was fortunate and lucky. *Fire and dew*—passionate and enthusiastic, as well as tender and yielding.

Stanza 4

Delayed it..... yet—their union may be delayed, but they are sure to meet in some future life. *Traverse*—travel. *For taking you*—for being united with you.

Stanza 5

Amber—golden. *Divine*—understand. *In the old one's stead*—in place of the earlier life on this earth.

Stanza 6

Gained me...various men—gained wide experience as a result of having lived through a number of lives. *Ransaked the ages*—gained the knowledge and wisdom of many ages. *Spoiled the climes*—gained the knowledge of many countries. *Soul's full scope*—in the very depth of my soul. *What is the issue ?*—what would be the outcome of our union in some life to come ? Only time can tell.

Stanza 7

Full as it could hold—full to over-flowing. *Place and to spare*—enough place.

25

The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church

(*a*) THE POEM

ROME, 15—

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews—sons mine ... ah God, I know not! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
'Do I live, am I dead?' Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
Peach-blossomed marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse,
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,

Rosy and flawless : how I earned the prize !
Draw close : that conflagration of my church
—What then ? So much was saved if aught were missed !
My sons, ye would not be my death ? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find ... Ah God, I know not, I !...
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast......
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the J[illegible] Church so gay.
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst !
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years :
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he ?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons ? Black—
'Twas ever antique-black I meant ! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath ?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables, but I know
Ye mark me not ! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm ? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at !
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then !
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.
My bath must needs be left behind, alas !
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs ?
—That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
Tully, my masters ? Ulpian serves his need !
And then how I shall lie through centuries,

And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet.
—Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
'Do I live, am I dead?' There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which swea
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
Well go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
—Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

The Poem : Its Publication

The poem was first published in **Hood's Magazine in 1845,** and the same year in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics.* Then in 1863, it was published in *Men and women* Saint Praxedes church is an old church in Rome, and the poem was inspired by Browning's visit to this church early in October, 1844. Saint Praxedes was the daughter of a Roman Senator in the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius in the second century A.D. The poem has a renaissance setting and the dying Bishop, who is the central personage in it, is as imaginary Bishop, typical of the sensuous, art-loving, and luxurious Bishops of the age.

A Dramatic Monologue—Critical Summary

The poem is one of the finest dramatic monologues of Browning. The speaker throughout is the dying Bishop, and his sons and nephews constitute the group of listeners. They do not speak even a single word, but we know of their reactions from the Bishop's own comments. Like other dramatic monologues of Browning, it is a penetrating psychological study of the emotions that welter in the mind and soul of the dying Bishop. Every line which he utters reveals some one facet or the other of his character.

The poem opens with the dying Bishop calling his sons and nephews round his bed to tell them of his last wish. First, he moralises about the vanity of human life. All human aspirations are vain, and they come to nothing. His wife, their mother, was a beautiful woman and Bishop Gandolf, his rival, envied him for having won her love and married her. But now she was dead, and he himself lay dying at the moment. Every one dies and all human loves and jealousies end in death. This shows that life on this earth is unreal and unsubstantial like a dream. Next, the Bishop refers to the peaceful atmosphere of the church of Saint Praxeds, and then comes to the question of a suitable tomb for himself, a question which is uppermost in his mind at the time.

He had selected a fine corner in the church for his tomb. But his rival, Bishop Gandolf, cheated him and took the corner for his own tomb. The Bishop curses his rival for this. As for himself, he has secured another corner. This corner may not be quite as spacious, but it commands a good view. From there one can see the pulpit on the epistle-side, a part of the choir, some of the seats, and the church-dome carved with angels. In this corner, a sunbeam is sure to lighten his grave now and then. There his dead body would be buried in a tomb made of basalt, and over it there would be a decorated canopy. The canopy would have nine pillars, four on each side, and one at his feet, where his son Anselm stands at the time. He wishes that his canopy should be all made of rare,

costly marble, as red in colour as red wine. He is happy in the thought that he would have a tomb of the costliest stone, while his rival has a tomb only of a white and yellow stone of a cheap variety.

The Bishop fears that his sons would not carry out his wishes and would not give him the gorgeous tomb he desires. So he tempts them saying that he is leaving to them all his villas, including that villa in the village named Frascati, a gorgeous villa which has such magnificent baths in it. In return, he asks from them a very little service. They should go to his vineyard and dig there at a particular place where once stood an oil-press. There in a basket of rushes covered with rotten fig leaves, they would find a lump of *lapis-lazuli* (a precious blue-stone). This lump is as big as a Jew's head, and as blue as a blue vein on the breast of Virgin Mary, in one of her portraits. They should place this stone over his tomb at the place where his knees would be. There it would look like the globe of blue stone which the figure of God carries in his hands in the brightly decorated Jesu Church where they go for worship. His rival Gandolf would look at it from his grave, and he would burst with envy. This thought is comforting to this wordly-minded Bishop.

For a moment, the dying Bishop again philosophises over the shortness of human life. Years pass by swiftly, as swiftly as a weaver's shuttle being thrown this way and that way. Then man dies and is buried, and none knows what happens to him after that. Then he again returns to the subject of his tomb. Earlier he had said that basalt should be used for the slab of his tomb. Now he modifies himself a little and says that, instead of basalt, antique-black, a costlier kind of black stone, should be used. This would provide a fine contrast to the decorative border below the slab. They should remember that they have already promised to give his tomb a bronze statue for a background. They should keep their promise. The Bishop is dying, his mental powers have grown weak, and there is much incoherence and confusion in his talk. He desires both Christian and pagan decorations for his tomb. He would like his tomb to be carved with figures of Christ preaching his *Sermon on the Mount*, of Saint Praxed in all her glory, and Moses holding in his hands a diary with the *Ten Commandments* inscribed on it. But he would also like to have on his tomb pagan carvings, Tripod, Thyrsus, Nymphs, and Pans. He would even like a carving showing a Pan ready to snatch away the garment of a nymph in order to feast his eyes on her naked beauty and to make love to her. This brings out the sensual nature of the Bishop.

The Bishop feels that his sons are not listening to him. He asks his beloved son Anselm what they are whispering in his ears. Perhaps they hope to enjoy and indulge in merry-making with the wealth that he is leaving for them, while he himself would lie in a tomb of some cheap, worthless stone, fit for the grave of a beggar. His rival Gandolf would look at him from his tomb, and laugh and mock at him. The very thought is intolerable to him.

However, the very next moment he hopes that his sons love him, and that they would make for him a tomb of Jasper (a costly stone of green colour) as they have already promised. If they do not keep their promise, his soul would grieve that he has left behind his gorgeous baths for them. He wants that at least one block of his tomb should be made of Jasper, as green as pistachio-nut. There is no shortage of Jasper, it can be found in abundance in the world. In return, he would pray to saint Praxed to give them horses, brown Greek manuscripts, and women with limbs as white as marble. But he would do so only if they carve his epitaph correctly in Latin, with words and phrases carefully selected. He would like the phrases to be carefully selected from the works of Tully or Cicero, the famous orator, and not from those of Ulpian who was a much inferior writer. The gaudy phrases of Ulpian may satisfy Gandolf, but he must have epitaph in the choicest Latin of Tully.

If his sons construct for him the grand tomb he desires, then he would lie in his grave peacefully for centuries to come. Lying in his grave, he would listen to some Roman Catholic priest performing the mass ceremony and muttering the prayers in a low tone. He will also witness the various other Roman Catholic ceremonies being performed in the church. He will see the candle burning steadily, and inhale the intoxicating smoke of the incense burning in the church.

As the end is near, the Bishop grows delirious. His heated brain makes him see himself as the effigy on his grave. He imagines himself standing on his grave with his hands folded, as if round his staff. Then he imagines his bed clothes to be the funeral pal, or shroud wrapped round his limbs, which falls down to the ground. as he stretches forth his legs. He imagines, next, that the candle is dying out. and he hears certain vague sounds speaking to him about his life on this earth, and also about his previous lives. Sometimes, this vague murmuring sound tells him of Popes, Cardinals and Priests, and at other times it seems to be the sound of St. Praxed preaching on the Mount. St. Praxed was a virgin, but the Bishop imagines her to be a man. *The Sermon on the Mount* was delivered by Christ, but to the dying Bishop it seems that it was delivered by St. Praxed. The delirious Bishop sees his dead wife with her pale face and speaking eyes, imagines that his remains have been kept in beautiful urns made of rare, agate stone, and that the language carved on his tomb is pure and appropriate. He mocks and jeers at the Latin epitaph carved on the tomb of his rival Bishop. One of the words used, "*Elucescebat*", meaning, "*he shone forth*", is wrong. It has been used by Ulpian. Therefore, he does not want the Latin of Ulpian. He wants the pure and correct Latin of Cicero.

The dying Bishop is conscious of the fact that his brief life on this earth has not been a worthy one. He has been gulity of much that was wicked and evil. Still he does not care for matters spiritual; he is more concerned with the construction of a proper, grand

tomb for his earthly remains. He asks his sons to promise that they would make his tomb all of *lapis lazuli*. If they do not promise to do so, he would give all his villas to the Pope. Their ingratitude has always caused him great grief. The glitter in their eyes reminds the Bishop of the bright eyes of their mother, his wife. This glitter seems to suck out his very soul, it shows that they are waiting eagerly for his death. The very next moment his heated imagination makes him think that his sons would add to the simple decoration of his grave, and thus heighten its effect. Perhaps, they would show the vase filled with grapes, cover the faces of the figures on the decorative border with a mask, and add square pillars, with the bust of Terminus, the Roman God of boundaries, on them. Perhaps, they would tie some cat like creature to the decorative altar, which, struggling for its freedom, would be represented as throwing down the wand carried by Bacchus, the wine-god. In this way, they would try to comfort his soul, as he lies in his grave.

But the very next moment he notices the look of ingratitude in their eyes, which causes him great pain, and he angrily asks them to leave him. They do not care for him, rather they wish him dead so that they may inherit his property. Perhaps, they would execute his grave in an unworthy manner. They would insult him by giving him a tomb made of ordinary old, and decaying sand stone. The stone-squares used for his tomb would be damb and moist, as if by the oozing out of the sweat of the corpse lying beneath. They would not use *lapiz-lazuli* which delights the world. Angrily he asks them to go away, but still he blesses them. He asks them to reduce the number of candles, and place them in a row. As they leave him, they should go respectfully with their backs turned, like a clergy leaving the altar. They should leave him alone there, to die peacefully in that church of peace. During his last moments, he would like to be alone, to watch undisturbed the effigy of old Gandolf over his tomb of onion-stone. He would like to make sure whether his rival still mocked at him, for having married their mother. She was so beautiful.

As a Psychological Study

The monologue has been highly admired by a number of critics. **E.T. Young** admires it for its penetrating study of the psychology of the dying Bishop. He writes, "the poem is a penetrating study of the emotions which welter in the Bishop's mind, now that his natural forces are too enfeebled to restrain them. Two by their constant recurrence give the clue to his life and character; *first* the life long envy of his ancient rival Gandolf; *second*, his consuming desire for a monument, splendid in design and rich in ornament. Round these cluster the passions and thoughts excited by suspicion of the intentions of his sons, whom he vainly attempts to bribe with sensual and epicurean delights; by the tacit confession of broken vows; by the memories of thefts committed to adorn his

tomb ; by his gloating triumph over the slip-shod Latin of Gandolf's epitaph ; by the soothing sense of the quiet incense-laden air of the "Church for peace". *All these diverse elements are composed into a consistent picture which reveals not simply the pagan humanistic Bishop, but at the same time the fundamental characteristics of an epoch.* The sensuous worldly-minded Bishop does not think of the salvation of his soul, nor of God, nor of life in the world to come, but is concerned with the construction of a suitable tomb for himself, splendid and richly ornamented " He is suspicious of his sons, knows that they will not carry out his wishes, and so cunningly seeks to tempt them and to bribe them His sensuality is seen in the line where he speaks of a Pan, *"ready to twitch the nymphs last garment off"*, or where he refers to, *"mistresses with great smooth marble limbs"*, Even at the moment of death, his jealousy and hatred for his rival Bishop Gandolf keeps breaking out. In short, every line reveals that the Bishop is greedy, petty-minded and worldly.

The Bishop : A Satirical Sketch

However, it must not be supposed that all the Renaissance Bishops were like this Bishop. There were many who were devout and religious in the true sense of the word. Rather the Bishop in the poem is a satire on a particular type. **Berdoe** sums up the whole issue in the following words : "There were Bishops like the Bishop of St. Praxed's such as the poet has so intimitably sketched for us ; but had there been no others of a more Christian type, religion in southern Europe would have died out instead of starting up as a giant refreshed to win, as it did, the world for Christ. The worldly Bishop of the poem is an "art for art's sake" ecclesiastic, who is not at all anxious to leave a life which he has found very satisfactory for a future state about which he has neither anxiety nor concern. What he is concerned for is his tomb. His old rival Gandolf has deprived him of the position in the church which he long·d for as a resting-place, but he hopes to make up for the loss by a more tasteful and costly monument, with a more classical inscription than his. This old fellow is as much Pagan as Christian, and his ornaments have as much to do with the gods and goddesses of old Rome as with the church of which he is a minister. *"In all this Mr. Browning finely satirises the Renaissance spirit, which, though it did good service to humanity in a thousand ways, was much more concerned with flesh than spirit."*

The Renaissance Note

Besides being a penetrating character study, the poem is also remarkable for having captured the very spirit of the Renaissance. It reveals at every step Browning's knowledge of Renaissance art and Renaissance history, both secular and religious. It is steeped in the Renaissance spirit, its love of colour, pomp and show, its love of horses, Greek manuscripts, and beautiful women, its greed and sensuality. **Ruskin** awards it high praise for its realistic presentation of

the very spirit of 16th century Italy, "Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages—always vital, right, and profound: so that in the matter of art, with which we are specially concerned, there is hardly a principle connected with the mediaeval temper that he has not struck upon in these seemingly careless and too rugged lines of his...I know no other piece of modern English prose or poetry in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I have said, of the central Renaissance, in thirty pages of the *Stones of Venice*, put into as many lines, Browning's also being the antecedent work."

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Line 1-15. Vanity, saith ....this tomb of mine.

A dying Bishop calls his sons and nephews around his bed as he wants to tell them of his last wish. He begins by telling them that life is a vanity. All human aspirations are vain, and they come to nothing. His wife, their mother, was a beautiful woman and Bishop Gandolf, his rival, envied him for having won her love and married her. But now she was dead, and he himself lay dying at the moment. Every one dies, and all human loves and jealousies end in death. This shows that life on this earth is unreal and unsubstantial like a dream. Having dwelt on the vanity of human life, the Bishop refers to the peaceful atmosphere of the church of Saint Praxed, and then comes to the question of a suitable tomb for himself, a question which is uppermost in his mind at the time.

St. Praxed—Praxed was the daughter of a Roman senator in the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius. She used all her riches in relieving the poor and the needy. She was martyred and achieved sainthood. A Church in Rome bears the name of this saint.

Vanity.........vanity—religious teachers teach us that human life is nothing but vanity. All human aspirations are vain, and come to nothing. All human ambitions, rivalries, loves and hatreds, end in death.

Draw round my bed—the Bishop asks his sons and nephews to stand round his bed, so that he may talk to them.

Anselm—the name of one of his sons. *Old Gandolf*—the name of the Bishop who was his rival in love, and who envied him for having married such a beautiful woman as their mother was.

I am Bishop since—He was not a Bishop during the life time of their mother. He became a Bishop after her death.

And thence you may perceive—the fact that all die shows that. *The world is a dream*—life on this earth is as unreal and unsubstantial as a dream.

Life, how and what is it?—What is the meaning and purpose of life. This is the eternal question which all have asked, but which none has been able to answer. Life still remains a mystery.

Dying by degrees—dying slowly. *In the dead night*—at midnight, when all is silent and quiet. *Peace, peace seems all*—there is perfect calm and quiet.

Saint Praxed.........for peace—according to the Bishop, the Church of Saint Praxed is well-known for its peaceful atmosphere.

And so, about this tomb of mine—now the Bishop comes to the point. He is very particular about his tomb. Even at the moment of death, he does not care for matters spiritual.

Lines 15-35 : I fought with tooth......were missed.

The dying Bishop had selected a fine corner in the church for his tomb. But his rival, Bishop Gandolf, cheated him and took the corner for his own tomb. The Bishop curses his rival for this. As for himself, he has secured another corner. This corner may not be quite as spacious but it commands a good view. From this corner, one can see the pulpit on the epistle-side, a part of the choir, some of the seats, and the church-dome carved with angels. In this corner, a sunbeam is sure to lighten his grave now and then. There his dead body would be buried in his tomb made of basalt, and over it there would be a decorated canopy. The canopy would have nine pillars, four on each side, and one at his feet where his son Anselm stands at the time. He wishes that the canopy over his tomb should be all made of rare, costly marble as red in colour as red wine, strong and effective. He is happy in the thought that he would have a tomb of the costliest stone, while his rival has a tomb only of a white and yellow stone of cheap variety.

Fought with tooth and nail—the Bishop tried his best. *Niche*—the corner in the church of St. Praxed which he had selected for his tomb.

Cozened—cheated ; deceived. *Shrewd was that snatch*—Gandolf snatched the corner from the Bishop in a very cunning manner. *He graced his carrion with*—there in that corner his dead body is buried. *Carrion*—dead flesh. *God curse the same*—the Bishop curses his rival.

My niche—the corner which he has now obtained *Cramped*—narrow. *Epistle-side*—the south side of a church. *Some what*—*i.e.* a part of. *The choir*—the place in the church where the group of singers sits. *Aery dome*—the hollow dome of the church. *Where live the angels*—on which are carved the figures of angels.

A sunbeam is sure to lurk—occasionally a ray of sunlight is sure to lighten his tomb.

Slab—piece of stone, here the tomb. *Basalt*—black marble, very rare and costly. *My tabernacle*—the decorated canopy over his

tomb. *Columns*—pillars supporting the canopy. *Two and two*—four on each side of his grave. *The odd one*—*i.e.*, the ninth pillar.

Peach-blossom marble all—the marble used for the canopy would be red like peach blossom. *The rare*—of a rare variety. *Of a mighty pulse*—strong in its effect (the sensuous nature of the Bishop is to be noted). *Paltry*—cheap ; worthless ; of no value at all. *Onion-stone*—a cheap kind of marble, white and green in colour.

Flawless—perfect ; exquisite. *How I earned the prize*—the Bishop got the corner for his tomb after a hard and difficult struggle. *Draw close*—he asks his sons to come nearer. *Conflagration*—burning. *If aught were missed*—if something was lost.

Lines 36-50.

The Bishop fears that his sons would not carry out his wishes, and would not give him the gorgeous tomb he desires. So he tempts them saying that he is leaving to them all his villas, including the villa in the village named Frascati, a gorgeous villa which has sucn magnificent baths in it. In return, he asks from them a very little service. They should go to his vineyard and dig there at a particular place where once stood an oil-press. There in a basket of rushes covered with rotten fig-leaves they would find a lump of *lapis-lazuli*. This lump is as big as a Jew's head, and as blue as a blue vein on the breast of Virgin Mary, in one of her portraits. They shwould place this stone over his tomb at the place where his knees would be. There it would look like the globe of blue stone which the figure of God carries in His hands in the brightly decorated Jesu church where they go for worship. His rival Gandolf would look at it from his grave, and he would burst with envy. (The very thought is comforting to this wordly-minded Bishop).

Bedded—concealed ; hidden. *Corded up*—fastened with strings, *Olivefrail*—a basket made of rushes. *Lapis Lazuli*—a precious blue stone. *Madonna*—a portrait of Virgin Mary. *Brave*—gorgeous. *Frascati*—the name of a village near Rome.

Like God............His hands—in the Jesu church in Rome, the altar is adorned with the Trinity. In the hands of God is the globe of blue stone to which the Bishop refers, and to which he likens the lump of *Lapis lazuli* which is to decorate his grave.

Burst—his heart would break into pieces with jealousy

Lines 51-79 Swift as a weaver's shuttle.........serves his nee...

For a moment, the dying Bishop philosophises over the shortness of human life. Years pass by swiftly, as swiftly as a weaver's shuttle being thrown this way and that way. Then man dies and is buried, and none knows what happens to him after that. Then he again returns to the subject of his tomb. Earlier he had said that basalt should be used for the slab of his tomb. Now he modifies himself a

little and says that, instead of basalt, antique-black, a costlier kind of black stone, should be used. This would provide a fine contrast to the decorative border below the slab. They should remember that they have already promised to give his tomb a bronze statue for a background. They should keep their promise. The Bishop is dying, his mental powers have grown weak, and there is much incoherence and confusion in his talk. He desires both Christian and pagan decorations for his tomb. He would like his tomb to be carved with figures of Christ preaching his *Sermon on the Mount*, of Saint Praxed in all her glory, and Moses holding in his hands a diary with *Ten Commandments* inscribed on it. But he would also like to have on his tomb pagan carvings showing a tripod, Thyrsus, Nymphs, and Pans. He would even like a carving showing a Pan ready to snatch away the garment of a nymph in order to feast his eyes on her naked beauty and to mak love to her.

The Bishop feels that his sons are not listening to him. He asks his beloved son Anselm what they are whispering in his ears. Perhaps they hope to enjoy and indulge in merry-making with the wealth that he is leaving for them, while he himself would lie in a tomb of some cheap, worthless stone, fit for the grave of a beggar. His rival Gandolf would look at him from his tomb, and laugh and mock at him. The very thought is intolerable to the Bishop.

The very next moment the Bishop hopes that his sons love him and they would make for him a tomb of Jasper (a costly stone of green colour) as they have already promised. If they do not keep their promise, his soul would grieve that he has left behind his gorgeous baths for them. He wants that at least one block of his tomb should be made of Jasper as green as pistachio-nut. There is no shortage of Jasper, it can be found in abundance in the world. In return be would pray to saint Praxed to give them horses, brown Greek manuscripts, and women with limbs as white as marble. But he would do so only if they carve his epitaph correctly in Latin, with words and phrases carefully selected. He would like the phrases to be carefully selected from the works of Tully or Cicero, the famous crator, and not from those of Ulpian who was a much inferior writer. The gaudy phrases of Ulpian may satisuly Gandolf, but he must have his epitaph in the choicest Latin of of Tully.

Basalt—a black marble. *Antiqu-black*—a black marble, rarer and costlier. *Contrast*—provide a suitable contrast *Frieze*—the decorative border beneath the slab of the tomb. *Bas-relief*—a statue which would form the background to the tomb. *Bronze*—a metal compounded out of brass and copper.

Pans—forest-gods in classical mythology. *Nymphs*—beautiful goddesses of rivers and oceans in ancient mythology. *Tripod*—the bronze altar in the temple of Apollo in ancient Greece. *Thyrsus*—the staff carried by Bacchus, the god of wine. *The Saviour......mount*—

the figure of Christ delivering his famous sermon, called, *"the Sermon on the Mount"*. *Praxed*—the daughter of a Roman senator who gave away all her wealth in charity. *Twitch*—snatch. *Tables*—tablet or diary.

To revel down my villas—to waste all my wealth in revelry and merry-making. *Bricked over*—entombed in. *Mouldy*—decaying. *Travertine*—a common stone, of no value at all, fit for the grave of a beggar. *Chuckles at*—laughs and jeers.

Jasper—a rare stone, green in colour. *Ye stand pledged to*—You have already promised to give me a tomb of Jasper. *Lest I grieve*—otherwise, his soul would feel sad. It would remain restless and dissatisfied.

And have I not......... pray—the Bishop promises that when in heaven he would pray to saint Praxed to grant them the gifts they so much desire. *Mistresses*—beloveds. *Marble limbs*—limbs as white and smooth as marble.

Aright—in the most correct and appropriate language. *Tully's every word*—Marcus Tullius Cicero, the model of Latin prose for all writers of the Renaissance ; the Bishop damands the most scholarly Latin for his epitaph.

Ulpian—A great Roman jurist and the chief adviser to the Emperor Alexander Severus. He was murdered by soldiers in 228 A.D. He belongs to the silver age of Latin prose, using words and forms for which no warrant could be found in the writers of the Augustan period. *No gaudy ware*—high sounding, bombastic, but otherwise worthless and inaccurate Latin prose of Ulpian, such as is used for the epitaph of his rival. *Epitaph*—the words inscribed on a tomb.

Lines 80-100

If his sons construct for him the grand tomb he desires, then he would lie in his grave peacefully for centuries to come. Lying in his grave, he would listen to some Roman Catholic priest performing the mass ceremony and muttering the prayers in a low tone. He will also witness the various other Roman Catholic ceremonies being performed in the church. He will see the candle burning steadily, and inhale the intoxicating smoke of the incense burning in the church. As the end is near, the Bishop grows delirious. His heated brain makes him see himself as the effigy on his grave with his hands folded, as if round his staff. Then he imagines his bedclothes to be the funeral pal or shroud wrapped round his limbs, which falls down to the ground, as he stretches forth his legs. He imagines, next, that the candle is dying out, and he hears certain vague sounds speaking to him about his life on this earth, and also about his previous lives. Sometimes, this vague murmuring sound tells him of Popes, Cardinals and Priests, and at other times it seems to be the sound of St. Praxed

preaching on the Mount (St. Praxed was a virgin, but the Bishop imagines her to be a man. *The Sermon on the Mount* was delivered by Christ, but to the lying Bishop it seems that it was delivered by St. Praxed). The delirious Bishop sees his dead wife with her pale face and speaking eyes, imagines that his remains have been kept in beautiful urns made of rare, agate stone, and that the language carved on his tomb is pure and appropriate. He mocks and jeers at the Latin epitaph carved on the tomb of his rival Gandolf. One of the words used, "*Elucescebat*", meaning, "he shone forth", is wrong. It has been used by Ulpian. Therefore, he does not want the Latin of Ulpian. He wants the pure and correct Latin of Cicero.

The blessed mutter—the prayer of the blessed Mass ceremony being uttered in a low tone by some Roman Catholic clergy. *Mass*—a Roman Catholic ceremony. *And see . . . day long*—the reference is to another Roman Catholic ceremony.

Stupifying—intoxicating. *I fold my arms, etc*—the dying Bishop is growing delirious. He imagines himself to be the statue or effigy standing on the tomb of his dreams. *Crook*—the staff carried by a Bishop, as the symbol of his holy office.

Mortcloth—shroud ; funeral Pall. *Laps and folds of sculptor's-work*—the dress worn by a statue.

Certain humming—some vague, indistinct voice speaking to him. *Agate*—a rare, costly stone. *Urns*—small ornamented pots or vases used by the ancient Greeks to keep the ashes of their dead.

Marble's language—the epitaph carved on the marble of his tomb. *Discreet*—appropriate. *Elucescebat*—Latin, meaning, "he shone forth." *Tully*—Cicero, the greatest of the masters of Latin prose. *Ulpian*—a writer inferior to Cicero. It is his prose, inaccurate and inappropriate, which has been used for the epitaph of Gandolf. The dying Bishop wants only the pure prose of Cicero.

Lines 101-125.

The dying Bishop is conscious of the fact that his brief life on this earth has not been a worthy one. He has been guilty of much that is wicked and evil. Still he does not care for matters spiritual ; he is more concerned with the construction of a proper, grand tomb for his earthly remains. He asks his sons to promise that they would make his tomb all of *Lapis Lazuli*. If they do not promise to do so he would give all his villas to the Pope. Their ingratitude has always caused him great grief. The glitter in their eyes reminds the Bishop of the bright eyes of their mother, his wife. This glitter seems to suck out his very soul ; it shows that they are waiting eagerly for his death. The very next moment his heated imagination makes him think that his sons would add to the simple decoration of his grave, and thus heighten its effect. Perhaps, they would show the vase filled with grapes, cover the faces of the figures on the decorative border with a mask, and add square pillars with the bust of Terminus, the Roman

god of boundaries, on them. Perhaps, they would tie some cat-like creature to the decorative altar, which struggling for its freedom would be represented as throwing down the wand carried by Bacchus, the wine-god. In this way, they would try to comfort his soul, as he lies in his grave.

But the very next moment he notices the look of ingratitude in their eyes, which causes him great pain, and he angrily asks them to leave him. They do not care for him, rather they wish him dead so that they may inherit his property. Perhaps, they would execute his grave in an unworthy manner. They would insult him by giving him a tomb made of ordinary old, and decaying sand stone. The stone-squares used for his tomb would be damp and moist, as if by the oozing out of the sweat of the corpse lying beneath. They would not use *lapiz lazuli* which delights the world. Angrily he asks them to go away, but still he blesses them. He asks them to reduce the number of candles, and place them in a row. As they leave him, they should go respectfully with their backs turned, like a clergy leaving the altar. They should leave him alone there, to die peacefully in that Church of peace. During his last moments, he would like to be alone, to watch undisturbed the effigy of old Gandolf over his tomb of onion-stone. He would like to make sure whether his rival still mocked at him, for having married their mother. She was so beautiful.

Pilgrimage—life on this earth. *Will ye......heart*—cause me great pain by your ingratitude. *As a lizard's quick*—sharp and glittering, like the eyes of a lizard.

Heighten—add to; beautify. *Impoverished*—poor; simple. *Frieze*—the decorative border. *Piece out*—add to. *Starved*—simple; poor. *Vizor*—mask; a covering for the face. *Term*—a pillar with the bust of Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries, on it. *Tripod*—the altar in the temple of Apollo, in ancient Greece. *Lynx*—a cat-like creature. *His struggle*—its efforts to free itself. *Thyrsus*—the wand carried by Bacchus, the wine-god. *Entablature*—tomb.

Stabbed me—caused me great pain; wounded me as with a dagger. *Gritstone*—ordinary, cheap sand-stone. *A-crumble*—old and decaying. *Clammy squares*—damp, square pieces of stone. *They keep*—which is buried in them. *Departing altar-ministrants*—clergy leaving the altar in a Roman Catholic church. *Onion-stone*—an inferior stone, red and white in colour.

26

Prospice

(a) THE POEM

Fear death ?—to feel the fog in my throat,
    The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
    I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
    The post of the foe ;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
    Yet the strong man must go ;
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
    And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
    The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
    The best and the last !
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
    And bade me creep past.
No ! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers,
    The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
    Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
    The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
    Shall dwindle, shall blend.
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
    Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul ! I shall clasp thee again,
    And with God be the rest !

(b) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

Its Publication : Its Title

The poem *Prospice* was first published in the *Dramatic Romance* in 1864. It was written in the autumn following the death of

Mrs Browning. '*Prospice*' is a Latin word meaning "*Look forward*". The title is apt and suggestive, for in it the poet looks forward with hope and confidence to meeting his beloved wife, Elizabeth, in the other world, after death. It is a monologue, but it is subjective and not dramatic, as are most other monologues of Browning. Throughout, it is the poet who is the speaker, and the monologue is an expression of the poet's own hope, courage, and determination.

Development of Thought

The poet does not fear death, rather he welcomes it, for he knows that it is only after death that he can meet his beloved wife. He is determined to face death bravely and fearlessly. Just as a climber on a mountain has to face fog and mist, storms and snowfalls, so also a dying man suffers from a feeling of suffocation and dimness of eyesight. His breathing grows hard and difficult, and his limbs grow cold. All this indicates that the dying person is nearing the place of Death, the arch-enemy of marnkind. But the poet would remain unafraid even when he sees Death face to face with all its terrors. The battle with death is the last battle of life, and the poet is determined to fight this last battle heroically and fearlessly. It is only after this last battle that the barriers which divide this world from the other world fall away, and the brave man reaches his destination. The poet is sure that after this last battle he would meet his beloved wife, and this would be a sufficient reward for him for all his suffering.

The poet has always been a fighter ; and his last fight, the fight with death, would be the most heroic of all. He challenges Death to do its worst, and cause him the maximum of suffering. He would not like to die in a cowardly manner, like a person who is blindfolded before he is shot dead, and so remains unaware of what is going to happen to him. He thus escapes much suffering. The poet does not want such a cowardly death. He would like to die like the brave heroes of old who suffered and endured heroically. Whatever arrears, "of pain, darkness and cold", still remain unpaid, he would like to pay them all at the moment of death, so that he may enjoy perfect happiness in the life to come. The terror and pain of Death is only momentary. Soon "the black minute" comes to an end, and the brave man, who has suffered and endured all, soon experiences "a peace out of pain", and then sees the light of heaven. It is this faith which sustains and strengthens the poet. He is quite optimistic that after death, in the other world, he would embrace his beloved wife once again. He says:

O' thou soul of my soul : I shall clasp thee again
And with God be the rest.

An Inspiring Poem

The poem is significant in many ways. First, it is one of the most inspring poems written on the subject of death. Nothing grander has been written on this subject. Says **Berdoe** in this connection,

"In the short poem *Prospice* is concentrated the strength of a great soul and the courage of one who is prepared for the worst, with eyes unbandaged. As an example of the poet's power nothing can be finer. The dramatic intensity of the opening lines—the fog, the mist, the snow, and the blasts which indicate the journey's end, "the post of the foe"—is unsurpassed even by Shakespeare himself. *It is a defiance of death, a challenge to battle.*"

A Great Love Poem

Secondly, the poem is an expression of the poet's passionate love for his wife. He wrote after her death, "*Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another better, there, where that lady lives, of whom my soul was enamoured*". It is this intense and passionate love which sustains and strengthens the poet, and he hurls defiance at the very face of death. It is thus an expression of the courage and determination of a heroic soul, Thirdly, the poem brings out the poet's optimism and his faith in the immortality of the human soul. The body may die but the soul lives on. His beloved wife may be dead as far as her physical self is concerned, but her spirit lives on with God in the other world. True lovers are sure to meet, if not in this life, then in the life to come. He is, therefore, optimistic that he would surely meet his beloved wife in heaven.

Conclusion

Prospice is one of the few subjective poems of Browning, and it is characterised by sincerity and intensity. It comes from the heart of the poet, and so goes direct to the heart of the readers. The language, though metaphorical and picturesque, is simple and easy. Despite an occasional parenthesis, it is entirely free from the usual obscurity of Browning's poetry.

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Fear death?—the poet is not at all afraid of death. *Fog*—suffocation.

Mist—dimness of eyesight.

When the snows begin—when the body of the dying man begins to grow cold. *Blasts*—hard-breathing at the moment of death.

I am nearing the place—the poet is approaching close to the place where Death, his enemy, waits to attack him.

The power of the night—the full force of the darkness of death. *The press of the storm*—the suffering caused by hard breathing at the moment of death.

The post of the foe—Death is the poet's enemy. He stands at his post (place of duty) ready to attack him as he draws near.

The Arch Fear—Death, the greatest fear of man. *In a visible form*—is seen clearly, in all its terror.

The journey is done—the journey of life is over. *The summit attained*—the journey of life is as difficult as climbing up a hill. Death is the summit or end of the Journey of life.

The barriers fall—with death, the barriers which divide true lovers fall away, and they meet in heaven. Life is the barrier and it ends with death.

A battle is to fight—the poet must fight the battle with death, the last battle of life. *Guerdon*—reward in the form of his meeting with his beloved.

The best—the most heroic of all the battles of this life.

Forbore—refrained from inflicting the maximum suffering upon him. *I would hate......creep past*—the poet would not like to die a cowardly death like a person whose eyes are bandaged before he is killed, so that he may not know before hand what is going to happen to him.

Taste the whole of it—suffer the maximum of pain and suffering. *Fare*—suffer. *Peers*—equals.

Bear the brunt—endure the maximum of pain. *In a minute...... and cold*—whatever debt of pain and suffering still remains unpaid, the poet would like to play it off at the moment of death, so that he may enjoy perfect bliss in the life to come.

The work—the pain and suffering at the time of death. *The best*—the maximum of happiness.

The black minute—the moment of death, when one suffers so acutely.

The element's rage—the fury of death which causes such suffering. *The fiend-voices that rave*—the confused, incoherent sounds which the dying man hears and which are supposed to be the voices of the messengers of Death come to take away the soul of the dying man.

Shall dwindle, shall blend—shall grow indistinct, and then die away.

I shall clasp thee again—the poet having reached heaven, would embrace his beloved once again.

27

Love In A Life

(a) THE POEM

Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her,
Next time, herself !—not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume !
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew,—
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door :
I try the fresh fortune—
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance ! she goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares ?
But 'tis twilight, you see,—with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune !

(b) CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY COMMENTS.

Stanza I

We inhabit together—in which the lover and his beloved have been living. *Hunt*—search.

Heart, fear nothing......herself—the poet has been searching for his beloved for a pretty long time, but has not been able to find her so far. However, he does not give up hope. He tries to encourage himself by the thought, that he would soon find her. His search would soon be crowned with success.

Trouble behind her......curtain—the vibration in the curtain caused by the beloved, as she passed through the door.

The couch's perfume—the scent of her body lingering on the couch which she has just left.

Brushed it—touched in passing.

The Cornice wreath blossomed anew—the flowers on the cornice began to blossom once again as the beloved touched them in passing. Probably, her dress brushed against them.

Gleamed—shown brightly. *At the wave of her feather*—as the feather in her hair was reflected in the mirror.

Stanza 2

The day wears—the day is coming to an end.

And door succeeds door—it seems to be a very big house with a number of rooms and doors.

I try the fresh fortune—the poet tries his luck in one room after another. He goes on searching for his beloved from one room to another.

Range—go about in search of. *The Wing*—the side-rooms. *The centre*—rooms in the centre of the house.

Still the same chance—still the same fate ; still he is unable to find her.

Who cares ?—but she does not care for this.

Twilight—the end of the day, as also of the life of the lover.

With such suits to explore—he has still to search such a large number of rooms. *Closets*—small rooms. *Alcoves*—covered nooks or recesses in a house.

To importune—to search.

(c) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

Love in a Life and *Life in a Love* are both companion pieces. However, the mood of the poet in the two lyrics is slightly different. In the present lyric the lover is persistent, the search is protracted and difficult, and so the lover feels frustrated and needs reassurance. In *Life in a Love*, the lover's mood is more optimistic.

Critical Summary

Love in a Life is a short lyric of two stanzas, each of eight lines. It appears that the lover and his beloved have been living in the same house, a very large one with a number of rooms, closets, alcoves, etc. However, the beloved has constantly avoided the company of the lover, and he has been persistently searching for her from room to room, but to no avail. He is ever conscious of her having left the room he enters, only a moment before. He can see the vibrating movement of the curtain caused by her departure, the blooming of the flowers on the cornice as her dress brushed against them and the glow in the mirror caused by the reflection of the

feather in her hair. He can also smell the sweet scent of her dress on the couch which she occupied only a moment ago. Thus he is ever conscious of her presence near him, but cannot find her.

The lover begins to despair, for he has searched for her all the day, and failure has always been his lot. Now the day is coming to an end, he continues the search, but still "she goes out, as he enters". It is always the same fate. She does not care for him or his persistence. She continues to avoid him, and does not relent.

Conclusion

The lyric may be interpreted symbolically. The quest for an ideal—say ideal beauty or ideal Love—is eternal and life-long, and the ideal always eludes the quester. But the quester must not despair or give up the quest, for success is sure to come to him, if not in this life, at least in lives to come.

28

Life In A Love

(*a*) THE POEM

Escape me ?
Never—
Beloved !
While I am I, and you are you,
So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear—
It seems too much like a fate, indeed !
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed—
But what if I fail of my purpose here ?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, get up to begin again,—
So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound,
At me so deep in the dust and dark,
No sooner the old hope drops to ground
Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
I shape me—
Ever
Removed !

(*b*) CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY COMMENTS

Stanza 1

Escape me......never—the poet's beloved can never escape him. He is sure to find her sooner or later.

While I am I......you—as long as we continue to live in this world as separate personalities.

The loth—the unwilling ; one who is not willing to respond to the love of the poet.

While the one......pursues—the chase must go on for ever, he pursuing, and she trying to escape.

My life is a fault—I have committed so many mistakes in my life. *Like fate*—as if it were my destiny to commit mistakes.

Stanza 2

What it I fail......here—it does not matter much if I fail to find my beloved in this world.

It—*i.e.* failure in this world.

To keep the nerves at strain—constant effort—whether successful or not—is good in itself, for it keeps one active and smart.

To dry one's eyes—not to weep at failure. *Fall*—failure.

Baffled—frustrated ; defeated.

The Chase—the pursuit of one's aims and ideals, here the pursuit of the beloved.

Farthest bound—greatest distance. *Look but once......bound*—the poet prays to the beloved to look at him once even from a distance.

So deep in the dust and dark—surrounded with the thick darkness of despair and grief.

The old hope drops to ground—as soon as his old hope is frustrated. *Straight*—at once. *Self-same*—the same, that very. *Mark*—object ; purpose. *I shape me*—I form for myself. The poet is not deterred by defeat or failure. Hope springs eternal in his breast, and he continues the pursuit of his beloved.

Ever removed—though he does never succeed, and his beloved always remains at a distance from him.

(*c*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

The lyric is a companion piece to the lyric, *Love in a Life*, but here the poet's mood is more optimistic. "The lover is glad, undaunted and dynamic", and his buoyant mood is reflected in the swift movement of the verse.

Critical Summary

The lover has been pursuing his beloved for quite a long time, but she has persistently avoided him. However, he is quite sure that she would never be able to escape him ; ultimately, sooner or later, he will be able to win her over and get her love. As long as they continue to have their separate personalities, he would persist in his pursuit of her. As long as she would continue to elude him, he would continue to chase her. The love-chase, thus, would be lifelong. No doubt, his life is full of mistakes, it seems as if he is

destined to commit mistakes and suffer failure. He is unlucky enough in as much as he fails, despite his best efforts.

But the failure does not make him hopeless or frustrated. Rather, he derives consolation and comfort from the very fact of failure. Failure to achieve one's purpose in this world is a blessing in disguise, for it keeps a man alert and active. It is always good for a man to take failure sportingly, and persist in the pursuit of his objective with the same singleness of purpose. The pursuit must be life-long, and failure must not be allowed to dampen the spirit.

So the lover is determined to continue the persuit of his beloved upto the very end of his life. He only prays to her to look at him only once, even from a long distance, and that one look would suffice to revive his hopes, to dispel his gloom and despair, and to make him resume his quest with renewed zeal.

Conclusion

The lyric is a forceful and telling assertion of the poet's optimism. He finds some good even in things evil and is hopeful of success, despite repeated failures. Interpreted symbolically, the lover's quest is the quest for ideal Beauty, for ideal love, for perfection, which for ever eludes the grasp of the quester. But the quest must continue, for great and noble achievement becomes possible only through life-long effort and persistence.

29

A Toccata of Galuppi's

(*a*) THE POEM

OH, Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I give you credit, 'tis with such a heavy mind!

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the good it brings.
What, they lived once thus a Venice, where the merchants were the kings,
Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 'tis arched by... what you call
...Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the carnival!
I was never out of England—it's as if I saw it all!

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May?
Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say?

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,—
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,
O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head?

Well (and it was graceful of them) they'd break talk off and afford
—She, to bite her mask's black velvet, he to finger on his sword,
While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord?

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,

Told them something ? Those suspensions, those solutions— 'Must we die ?'
Those commiserating sevenths—'Life might last ! we can but try !'

'Were you happy ?'—'Yes'.—'And are you still as happy ?'— 'Yes—And you ?'
—'Then more kisses'—'Did I stop them, when a million seemed so few ?'
Hark—the dominant's persistence, till it must be answered to !

So an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare say !
'Brave Galuppi ! that was music ! good alike at grave and gay !
I can always leave off talking, when I hear a master plays.'

Then they left you for their pleasure : till in due time, one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone,
Death came tacitly and took them where they never see the sun.

But when I sit down to reason,—think to take my stand nor swerve
Till I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close reserve,
In you come with your cold music, till I creep thro' every nerve.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned—
'Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned !
The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be discerned.

'Yours for instance, you know physics, something of geology,
Mathematics are your pastime ; souls shall rise in their degree ; Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not die, it cannot be !

'As for Venice and its people, merely born to bloom and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop.
What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop ?

'Dust and ashes !' So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.

Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.

(b) CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY COMMENTS

Toccata—a tune with a rapid, flowing movement. *Galuppi*—Baldassare Galuppi (1706-85) was a celebrated composer of tunes. He was a Venetian, and he also wrote a large number of operas. Browning was fond of his *Toccatas* and often played them on the harpischord (a musical instrument).

Lines 1—6

Misconceive you—fail to understand you correctly; interpret your meaning wrongly. *It would prove me deaf and blind*—a failure to understand Galuppi would imply that the poet is incapable of understanding anything.

I give you credit—I believe what you tell me through your music. *It is with such a heavy mind*—it makes me sad (Galuppi's tunes tell the poet, that the Venetians were vain and frivolous. The poet believes him, but the very thought makes him sad).

Here you......music—the poet imagines that the famous composer is playing before him.

What, they......Venice—the poet is amazed to find that once Venetians lived such a vain and frivolous lives.

The merchants were the kings—the merchants were the real rulers of Venice.

St. Mark—the cathedral or church of Venice where Galuppi often played.

The Doges—the rulers or chief magistrates of Venice. *The Doges......with rings?*—to indicate the dependence of Venice on the sea. every year the Doges were rowed to the sea, where they dropped a gold ring to symbolise the marriage of the state of Venice with the sea. The two were inseparable.

Lines 7—15

The sea is the street there—the sea was like a common street for the state of Venice. Their ships were constantly sailing on it, for trade and commerce, as well as for pleasure.

Shylock's bridge—the Rialto, the Exchange of Venice, is the centre of trade and commerce. Round it there were a number of buildings used as clubs or pleasure-houses. *Kept the carnival*—indulged in frivolous pleasures of all sorts.

It is as if I saw it all—those Venetians are no more, but the

music of Galuppi calls up a picture of their frivolous life before the poet's eye.

Balls—dances. *Marks*—dramatic entertainments in which the actors wore masks on their faces.

Burning over to mid-day—continued late into the day.

Where they made......marrow—the reference may be to the sex-intrigues hatched during nights of pleasure.

Was a lady......so red—the music of Galuppi reminds the poet of the beauty of Venetian women.

Buoyant—animated with pleasure.

Superb abundance—the music conjures up the picture of women with big, beautiful breasts.

Lines 16—21

Clavichord—the harpischord, the favourite musical instrument of Galuppi.

Lesser third, sixths diminished, suspensions, solutions, commiserating-sevenths, dominants, octave, etc.—these are all technical terms from music, the names of different notes. The poet imagines they express different emotions.

And afford—spare some time to listen to the tune being played by Galuppi.

So plaintive—which express grief. *Sigh on sigh*—expressive of of sorrow and suffering.

Must we die—which suggest decay and death.

Commiserating—arousing the emotions of pity and sympathy ; pathetic.

"*Life might last ; we can but try*"—the words express sympathy for the sick and dying. Such emotions are aroused by the 'Commiserating' sevenths.

Lines 22—30

Were you happy......when I hear a master play—the tunes of Galuppi suggest to the poet an imaginary dialogue between two lovers, who for a moment pause in their conversation and in their love-making, listen to the music, and admire Galuppi for his skill.

Dominant......Octave struck answer—the "dominant" suggests a question, and '*Octave*' its answer.

As well undone—deeds which also came to nothing.

Tacitly—silently ; without making any noise. *Took them where they never see the day*—the grave or the land of the dead.

Lines 31—39

But when I sit down to reason......it cannot be—in these lines

the poet imagines that Galuppi is talking to him. He tells the poet while the vain and frivolous people of Venice are dead and forgotten, he, the poet, will be remembered for ever owing to his knowledge of science.

To reason—to study and think logically. *To take my stand nor swerve*—to select a particular line of study and reason, follow it with determination, and never to deviate from it.

Till I triumph .....reserve—till he has succeeded in conquering some one or the other closely guarded secret of nature, till he has discovered some law or principle of science.

In you come with your cold, music—the poet imagines that Galuppi disturbs him in his studies with his music which is 'cold' as compared to his object of study.

Cricket—a small insect which frequents lonely, desolate places. Its singing is harsh and unpleasant.

Dust and ashes......earned—the music of Galuppi tells the poet of the ruin of Venice and all its glory.

Where a soul can be discerned—where there is a soul, the implication being that the people of Venice had no soul.

Yours for instance—the poet is a scientist. He is a profound scholar. He has a soul. Hence he would achieve immortality.

Butterflies may dread extinction—vain and frivolous people of Venice are called butterflies. They had no souls. Hence they have been totally destroyed.

Lines 40—45

In these lines, the poet expresses the view that the vain and frivolous people of Venice were alive and young in the true sense of the word, while he, despite all his knowledge, lacks youth and vitality. He is dead, for he has lost the capacity of enjoying life.

When the kissing had to stop—when the pleasures of life are denied.

Dust and ashes—the frivolous Venetians are totally extinct. *So you creak it*—this is what the music of Galuppi suggests to the poet. *I want the heart to scold*—but the poet cannot find fault with them.

The gold—beautiful, golden coloured hair.

Brush their bosoms—the hair, so long, that it touched their bosoms.

I feel chilly and grown old—the very thought of the extinction of all those beautiful women, saddens the poet and makes him feel old.

(c) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION— CRITICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

A Toccata of Galuppi's was first published in *Men and Women* in 1855. It is the first poem of Browning devoted entirely to music and its effects. Baldassare Galuppi was a reputed composer of early 18th century Venice. He was specially known for this *Toccatas*, and Browning often played his tunes on the harpischord, a musical instrument.

Critical Summary

The poet imagines that he is listening to a Toccata being played by the famous composer himself. The music conjures up before his mind's eye a picture of 18th century Venetians and their life. He sees with mind's eye the cathedral of St. Mark, as well as the sea where every year the Chief Magistrate of Venice was taken out and there he "wed the sea with a ring". Venice at that time was a rich and prosperous state, and the life was vain and frivolous. The people were given to dancing, drinking and gambling. Love and sex dominated social life, and sex-intrigues and seductions were the order of the day. Such a corrupt and immoral society could not survive for long. The people had no soul, and they perished leaving no trace or memory behind. Such is the end of all soulless people.

The poet also imagines that the famous composer, while condemning the corrupt Venetian society of his day, congratulates him on his devotion to science and predicts that he would be immortal, for he has a soul. But the poet does not agree with him. The people of Venice might have been vain and frivolous, but they had the capacity to enjoy their life, while he himself has lost that capacity. He is, therefore, dead, though he may be living in the ordinary sense of the word. He is sad to think that so much beauty has perished, and regards Galuppi as an old cricket who makes him feel 'Creepy', 'Chilly' with his cold music.

Conclusion

The poem brings out Browning's first hand knowledge of the technicalities of the art of music. He believes that life is meant to be lived and enjoyed and any denial of it is a sign of ungratefulness towards our Maker. God created Beauty—beauty of woman, beauty of nature—and we must gratefully accept this gift of God, and show our gratefulness by our whole-hearted enjoyment of it.

30

By the Fire-side

(*a*) THE POEM

How well I know what I mean to do
  When the long dark Autumn evening come ;
And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue ?
  With the music of all thy voices, dumb
In life's November too !

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,
  O'er a great wise book as beseemeth age,
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows,
  And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose !

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
  'There he is at it, deep in Greek :
Now then, or never, out we slip
  To cut from the hazels by the creek
A mainmast for our ship !'

I shall be at it indeed, my friends :
  Greek puts already on either side
Such a branch-work forth, as soon extends
  To a vista opening far and wide,
And I pass out where it ends.

The outside-frame, like your hazel-trees :
  But the inside-archway widens fast,
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
  And we slope to Italy at last
And youth, by green degrees.

I follow wherever I am led,
  Knowing so well the leader's hand :
Oh woman-country, wooed not wed,
  Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
Laid to their hearts instead !

Look at the ruined chapel again
  Half-way up in the Alpine gorge!
Is that a tower, I point you plain,
  Or is it a mill or an iron-forge
Breaks solitude in vain?

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
  The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
  The thread of water single and slim,
Through the ravage some torrent brings!

Does it feed the little lake below?
  That speck of white just on its marge
Is Pella; see, in the evening glow,
  How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets Heaven in snow!

On our other side is the straight-up rock;
  And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
By boulder-stones where lichens mock
  The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block.

Oh, the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
  And the thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!
  For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun,
These early November hours,

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
  Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield, else gold from rim to boss,
  And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needled mat of moss,

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
  Last evening—nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
  Where a freaked, fawn-coloured, flaky crew
Of toad-stools peep indulged.

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
  That takes the turn to a range beyond,
Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge
  Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
Danced over by the midge.

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
  Blackish-grey and mostly wet;
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
  See here again, how the lichens fret
And the roots of the ivy strike!

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams—

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

It has some pretension too, this front,
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
Set over the porch, art's early wont :
'Tis John in the Desert, I surmise,
But has borne the weather's brunt—

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
For a pent-house properly projects
Where three carved beams make a certain show,
Dating—good throught of our architect's—
'Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times :
The place is silent and aware ;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes
But that is its own affair.

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
Oh heart, my own, oh, eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,
With whom beside should I dare pursue
The path grey heads abhor ?

For it leads to crag's sheer edge with them ;
Youth, flowery all the way, there stops—
Not they ; age threatens and they contemn,
Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
One inch from our life's safe hem !

With me, youth led...I will speak now,
No longer watch you as you sit
Reading by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it
Mutely my heart knows how—

When, if I think but deep enough,
You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme ;
And you, too, find without rebuff

Response your soul seeks many a time
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff.

My own, confirm me ! If I tread
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that, by its side,
Youth seems the waste instead ?

My own, see where the years conduct !
At first, 'twas something our two souls
Should mix as mists do ; each is sucked
Into each now : on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct.

Think, when our one soul understands
The great Word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and Heaven expands,
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands ?

Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the divine !

But who could have expected this
When we two drew together first
Just for the obvious human bliss,
To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss ?

Come back with me to the first of all,
Let us lean and love it over again,
Let us now forget and now recall,
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall !

What did I say ?—that a small bird sings
All day long, save when a brown pair
Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
Strained to a bell : 'gainst the noon-day glare
You count the streaks and rings.

But at afternoon or almost eve
'Tis better ; then the silence grows
To that degree, you half believe
It must get rid of what it knows,
Its bosom does so heave.

Hither we walked then, side by side,
  Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
And still I questioned or replied,
  While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
Lay choking in its pride.

Silent to crumbling bridge we cross,
  And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
And care about the fresco's loss,
  And wish for our souls a like retreat,
And wonder at the moss.

Stoop and kneel on the settle under,
  Look through the window's grated square :
Nothing to see ! For fear of plunder,
  The cross is down and the altar bare,
As if thieves don't fear thunder.

We stoop and look in through the grate,
  See the little porch and rustic door,
Read duly the dead builder's date ;
  Then cross the bridge that we crossed before,
Take the path again—but wait !

Oh moment, one and infinite !
  The water slips o'er stock and stone ;
The West is tender, hardly bright :
  How grey at once is the evening grown—
One star, the chrysolite !

We two stood there with never a third,
  But each by each, as each knew well :
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
  The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

Oh, the little more, and how much it is !
  And the little less, and what worlds away !
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
  Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this !

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
  So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her :
I could fix her face with a guard between,
  And find her soul as when friends confer,
Friends—lovers that might have been.

For my heart had a touch of the woodland time,
  Wanting to sleep now over its best.
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,

But bring to the last leaf no such test !
'Hold the last fast !' says the rhyme.

For a chance to make your little much,
To gain a lover and lose a friend,
Venture the tree and a myriad such,
When nothing you mar but the year can mend :
But a last leaf—tear to touch !

Yet, should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddying down till it find your face
At some slight wind—best chance of all !
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
You trembled to forestall !

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonise,
And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize !

Oh, you might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word.
If you join two lives, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third ;
One near one is too far.

A moment after, and hands unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast ;
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life : we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

The forests had done it ; there they stood ;
We caught for a moment the powers at play :
They had mingled us so, for once and good,
Their work was done—we might go or stay.
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

How the world is made for each of us !
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,
When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit, the thing it does !

Be Hate that fruit or Love that fruit,
  It forwards the General Deed of Man,
And each of the Many helps to recruit
  The life of the race by a general plan ;
Each living his own, to boot.

I am named and known by that moment's feat ;
  There took my station and degree ;
So grew my own small life complete,
  As nature obtained her best of me—
One born to love you, sweet !

And to watch you sink by the fire-side now
  Back again, as you mutely sit
Musing by fire-light, that great brow,
  And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Yonder, my heart knows how !

So, earth has gained by one man the more,
  And the gain of earth must be Heaven's gain too ;
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
  When the autumn comes : which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

(b) CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY COMMENTS

Stanza 1

When the long dark evenings come—when I grow old, and my powers begin to decline. *Autumn* is symbolic of old age. *My soul*—it may refer to the poet's beloved wife (Elizabeth Barrett Browning) sitting near him, or to his own soul.

Is thy pleasant hue ?—the poet imagines that they have grown old, and his wife has lost her youthful beauty, or his soul has lost all its fiery zest for life.

With the music......dumb—his wife has lost the capacity to charm by her sweet, musical voice, or the music has passed out of the poet's soul and he is no longer able to enjoy himself, as he used to do in the spring of life.

Life's November—old age.

Stanza 2

O'er—pouring over ; reading. *Beseemeth*—is proper for. *While the shutters......blows*—the window shutters flutter as the wind passes through them. *Not verse......prose*—the poet imagined that in old age he reads only prose, and not poetry as in his youth.

Stanza 3

Till the young ones whisper—the poet imagines that their

children come and whisper among themselves, as they see their father deep in his study of some Greek book.

Now or never—now is the chance for us to go out, we may never again get such a golden opportunity.

Creek—the brook. *For our ship*—for their toy-ship.

Stanza 4

Such a branch-work forth—Greek literature branches out on all sides into all kinds of learning, and on all subject. It opens out a vast vista of knowledge to the reader's eye. *And I pass out where it ends*—the poet imagines that he reads on, and no sooner does he reach the end of one vista, another opens out before him.

Stanza 5

The outside-frame—the outer appearance of the vista is like a hazel tree slim and tender. *Inside-archway*—vision into life which one gets through a study of ancient Greek literature. *But the inside archway, etc.*—"Greek authors, at the first sight, appear to be easier and less complex, as are hazel trees, but once you have entered inside the Greek authors and their contents, the speculative thought goes on multiplying itself into inter-connected ideas endlessly."

And a rare sort succeeds to these—and only a mind of exceptional insight can succeed in grasping them. *And we slope to Italy*—the speculation on Greek authors, through association of ideas, reminds him of Italy. *We*—Browning and his beloved wife. *By green degrees*—we descend from Greece to Italy, from old to young age, with increasing degrees of greenness. "Old is grey, youth is green." The poet is reminded of their journey through the green Italian landscape in their youth. The landscape was green and so was their period of life—youth.

Stanza 6

The leader's hand—the hand of his beloved wife, who was his leader. *Woman-country*—Italy, a country beautiful and charming, like a woman.

Wooed not wed—loved by the people of other countries, who, however, did not settle down in Italy and make her their home. They loved her but were not married to her.

Earth's male-lands—inhabitants of other European countries, more vigorous and energetic than the people of Italy.

Laid to their hearts—loved Italy, as a man loves his mistress, though he does not marry her.

Stanza 7

Ruined chapel—a church in the Alpine mountains which the Brownings visited in September, 1853. *Gorge*—a narrow passage between mountains.

Iron-forge—a furnace for the use of black smiths. *Breaks solitude in vain*—it is so lovely and secluded, that the silence is not disturbed by the workers at work on the furnace.

Stanza 8

Heart of things—at the very centre of Nature. *Heaped and dim*—dense and dark.

From slab to slab—from one stone to another. *The thread of water*—a small, thin rivulet or stream.

Through the ravage some torrent brings—it is an outflow from some strong and destructive current of water.

Stanza 9

Feed—supply water to. *On its marge*—on the margin of the lake. *Pella*—a village of North Italy.

Silver spear-heads—the snow covered pointed peaks, which look like spears and seem to pierce the bosom of the sky. It is an imaginative image, startling in its freshness, originality and vividness.

Alp meets Heaven in snow—the snow-covered peaks of the Alps are so high that they seem to meet the sky, as if in a battle.

Stanza 10

Straight-up rock—a mountain peak. *A path is kept*—the path is clearly marked out by the huge rocks which serve as a kind of boundary line. *Gorge*—a pass, or a narrow path between mountains. *Where lichens mock...on a moth*—lichens have spots or marks on them closely resembling the spots on the body of a moth. *Lichens*—a kind of moss ; the huge rocks or pieces of stones are covered with moss.

Fit their teeth—fasten their roots on. *Polished back*—smooth surface of the stones.

Stanza 11

Oh, the sense of the yellow mountain etc.—the feelings of pleasure produced by the yellow mountain flowers. *And thorny balls etc.*—the seeds thrown out by ripe chestnuts in showers are covered by a thorny coating, divided into three parts each containing a seed. *For the drop of the woodland etc.*—November marks the end of the Autumn and the ripe fruits begin to fall on the ground.

Stanza 12

That crimson the creeper's leaf across—the red spot on the leaf of the creeper resembles the splash of blood on a golden shield. *Gold from rim to boss*—spreading from the edge of the shield to its very centre. *Boss*—the embossed or jutting outer part. *And lay*

it—the ground overgrown with moss has been likened to a carpet on which are laid the yellow leaves with pink spots, as though for a display of their beauty. The moss-carpet itself is covered with cup-shaped flowers, which are used by fairies as cups, and the long bristles of firs which they use as needles.

That crimson...mat of moss—The yellow leaves of the creeper are marked with red spots which resemble the splash of blood on a golden shield, reddening the shield from the border to its very centre. And these leaves with red spots are laid as though for show over the cup-shaped flowers that have grown over the moss of carpet, needled by fairies, with the needle-like long bristles of firs.

Stanza 13

By—quite close to the carpet of moss. *The rose-flesh mushrooms*—mushrooms red like a rose. *Undivulged*—unopened. *First dew*—early morning dew. The mushrooms had not flowered till the early morning.

Yon—in front ; at a little distance. *Coral*—red like coral. *Bulged*—opened out ; flowered. *Nipple*—a nipple-shaped mushroom.

Freaked—spotted. *Flaky crew*—a group of mushrooms covered with flakes of snow. *Toad-stools*—a kind of mushroom, which is poisonous. *Peep indulged*—indulged in a peep, an inverted construction. Browning often writes 'tale first' in this way ; peeped out or looked at coral nippled mushrooms which had suddenly flowered.

Stanza 14

The fronting ridge—the ridge or mountain-wall in front of them. *Range beyond*—the mountain range at a distance.

The Chapel—the ruined chapel referred to above. *Midge*—mosquitoes, which dance or hover over the pool of stagnant water.

Stanza 15

Are of stone alike—are built of the same stone. *Cut hemp-stalks*—stalks of hemp which have been cut. Hemp is grown on a large scale over the Alpine valley.

Steep in the narrow dyke—the cut stalks of hemp are steeped into a ditch, so that they may rot, and the fibre may be separated from the stalk. *Steep*—soak. *Dyke*—ditch.

Lichens fret—lichens (mosses) spread over the stones, form patterns of different shapes, as if they were ornamenting the stones. *The roots of the ivy strike*—roots of ivy pierce deep into the stony surface.

Stanza 16

Poor little place—the small lonely chapel. *On a festa-day*—on

festive days. *Scattered homes*—their homes scattered all over the valley. *Precinct small*—small boundary of the chapel.

By the dozen ways one roams—by numerous paths on which one can wonder about. The people come to the chapel by all these paths.

Stanza 17

To drop—to come down. *Hemp-dressers' low shed*—low sheds of the hemp-workers.

Grange—granary ; store-house. *Wattled cote*—places of concealment thatched with branches and leaves. *Fowlers*—bird-catchers. *Gear*—nets. *Bare juts*—projecting rocks without any vegetation.

Stanza 18

It has some pretension too—the front portion of even this lonely chapel pretends to have some artistic decoration. *Its bit of fresco*—its bit of painting on the wall. *Half-moon-wise*—in a semi-circular fashion. *Art's early wont*—as was the paractice in the early days of art. *'Tis John in the Desert, I sumise*—I guess that the fresco, *i.e.* the painting, which has been worn away by weather, shows St. John in the desert.

Stanza 19

Pent-house—a projecting shed to protect the main building from rain. *Three carved beams etc.*—only three carved beams of the original pent house are left. The rest of it has been worn out. *Beam*—a large and straight piece of timber or iron forming one of the main supports to a building. *'Five, six, nine*—1569, one has been omitted. The remaining part of the pent house makes up the figure 569 telling us that the building was constructed in the year 1569.

Stanza 20

Aware—the chapel has been humanised. It is said to be aware or conscious of the deeds that were performed there. *Its own affair*—none else, not at least the poet and his beloved, has anything to do with those deeds.

Stanza 21

Perfect—both in beauty and faithfulness. *Leonor*—faithful like Leonor, the heroine of Beethoven's opera *Fidello.*

Whom else could I...abhor ?—The poet says that if he looks back with pleasure to the days of his youth, it is only because his youth was blessed with her sweet love ; if he looks forward to old age with contentment, it is because he is sure his beloved wife would

be with him. He does not hate old age like others, because he knows he would still have the sweet company of his beloved wife.

The paths grey heads abhor—old age hated by old people.

Stanza 22

It—old age. *Crag's sheer edge*—the peak which stands close to the gulf or pit of death. *With them*—for the old men, who hate old age, because it takes them very close to death.

There stops—ends with old age, hence they hate it. *Not they*—they live on, even though their youth is no more.

They contemn—they hate old age. *The gulf*—i.e. death. *Hem*—boarder. *One inch from...hem*—in the old age death is close at hand, quite close to the margin which separates life from death.

Stanza 23

With me—the poet is different from other people in his attitude to old age.

Youth led—inspired by youth. *No longer watch you*—so far I have been looking at you, but now I will talk to you as lovers often talk to each other in perfect silence. *great brow*—broad forehead. *Spirit small*—small and delicate like that of some fairy. *Propping it*—supporting the forehead. *Mutely*—in silence.

Stanza 24

When, if I think deep enough—if I the lover, feel and think deeply, those deep felt and thought things are communicated to you, the beloved, by something like telepathy.

Prompt as rhyme—prompt as one rhyming line following the other. *Without rebuff*—without disappointment. *Piercing its fine flesh-stuff*—piercing through the fine barriers of the body.

Response...seeks—the response which the lover expects from the beloved.

Stanza 25

Confirm me—help me in recollecting the past, by correcting me wherever I go wrong.

Tread this path back—try to recollect the past, which is full of the happy memories of their love.

It led to an age so blest—the poet is proud of the fact that their youthful love has lead to an old age so happy and full of bliss. *Youth seems...instead*—it seems that they wasted their youth, it is their old age which is really the happiest period of their lives.

Stanza 26

Where the years conduct—see what heights of happiness we have climbed with the passing of time. *Should mix as mists do*—our

union was not complete and perfect ; it was only dimly realised. *Each is sucked into each now*—our union is now perfect and complete.

The new stream rolls—the current formed by the union of two souls flows on. *Whatever rock obstruct*—unchecked by any difficulties that may come in the way.

Stanza 27

One soul—the new soul formed by the fusion of their two souls.

The great Word...new—Browning here has in mind words from St. John's *Revelation*—St. John had the Revelation of New Jerusalem coming into being. This new Jerusalem with a new home in it was to be a reward for the fulness of their love. The greatness of the divine purpose will come to home to their united hearts, just as it happened with St. John when his heart was full of love for the divine.

The great Word—love, which is an expression of divine purpose. *Makes all things new*—transforms everything, imparts a new glory and new beauty, even to the most commonplace.

Where earth...expands—the words convey an idea of the spiritual ecstacy of true love.

In the house not made with hands—the divine world, the abode of the *virtuous* which would be their home by virtue of their perfect love.

Stanza 28

Your brain prompt mine—my thoughts should find a prompt respone from you ; and my emotions should be reflected in the emotions of your heart. Their minds and hearts must work in complete unison.

You must be just before—you must continue to inspire me, by your perfect love and sympathy, as you have been doing so far.

Depths of the divine—depths of divine purpose in making love the supreme virtue and the highest good.

Stanza 29

This—such complete spiritual union. *Obvious human bliss*—ordinary human pleasure, the pleasure of love and sex. *With a thing men seldom miss*—the pleasures of sex which all enjoy.

Stanza 30

Come back—think of ; recollect.

To the first of all—when we first met, and fell in love at first sight.

Let us lean—let us think of it. *Let us now forget*—let us forget the present. *Love it over again*—remember the past, and live it over again in memory, and thus enjoy the pleasures of that time once again.

Rosary—a string of beads of pearls. If it breaks the beads or pearls fall down in a shower.

Let us now forget...let fall—Let us go back to our past and revive the love we felt during that period. It will be like the carrying of a broken rosary, with some of its beads collected and some lost, in that process. Similarly some of the past events would be lost in forgetfulness.

Stanza 31

With wide wings—with their wings spread wide.

Strained to a bell—fully expanded and because of there curved shape looking like bells. *The streaks and rings*—the marks seen on the wings of a hawk when they are expanded.

Stanza 32

'Tis better—the view of the forest (surrounding the chapel referred to above) from the mountain path is better in the evening when there is perfect silence.

It must get rid of what it knows—that the forest is about to speak out the secrets it knows. *Its bosom does so heave*—its heart seems to palpitate with the desire to speak out its secrets.

Stanza 33

Hither—i.e. the silence of the forest surrounding the ruined chapel.

Convulsed to really speak—bursting forth with the intense desire of expressing the feelings of my heart.

Lay choking in its pride—the poet felt choked, because out of his pride he did not speak out frankly and openly.

Stanza 34

Crumbling—decaying ; falling. *Pity and praise*—express, our concern as well as admiration. *Fresco's loss*—the paintings on the walls of the chapel which have grown faded owing to the effect of weather.

A like retreat—equally beautiful and secluded spot. *Wonder at the moss*—express our admiration for the beauty of studded moss.

Stanza 35

Settle—a kind of low bench with a high back. *Grated square*—

windows having iron grating. *Cross is down*—the cross has been removed. *Thieves don't fear thunder*—as if thieves are not afraid of God's anger.

Stanza 36

The dead builder's date—dating—"good thought of our architect's—Five, six, nine, he lets you know".

But wait—let us wait a moment before we turn back.

Stanza 37

One moment—a significant moment. *Infinite*—long. *Stock*—tree. *Tender*—slim. *One star*—the evening star called Venus. *Chrysolite*—precious stone of green colour.

Oh moment......the chrysolite—Let us pause for one long moment here. The water flows through trees and over stones. The west is tenderly dim due to twilight ; sun's rays are not hard and penetrating. The evening is strikingly grey. The evening star has appeared in the sky, shining like a chrysolite.

Stanza 38

Made up a spell—the sounds and the sights all combined to cast a magic spell on our hearts. *Trouble grew*—the restlessness for love and sex, increased.

Stanza 39

Oh, the little more—Sometimes how much is said by what we call a little. *Worlds away*—a world of difference, a great difference is to be found in the so-called word 'little' and the 'much' actually represented by it. *How a sound shall quicken etc.*—a single sound may change ordinary contentment, even the vital circulation of blood. *Life be the proof of this*—the experience of our life bear witness to this fact.

Stanza 40

The screen—the wall of reserve. *Fix her face*—fix my looks on her face. *Guard*—with a screen.

And find her soul......might have been—in that case instead of being lovers, they would have continued to be mere friends. It is the little which makes all the difference. A 'little' less of reserve made them lovers ; a 'little' more of it, and they would have remained mere friends.

Stanza 41

Woodland-time—the spring season, and so full of the youthful zest for life.

To sleep over—to hold fast ; to stick to ; to remember for

ever. *Its best*—the happiest moments of their lives, when their love was young and fresh.

Shake the whole......prime—in the spring season a tree is so full of leaves that even it is shaken violently it cannot be deprived of all its leaves.

But bring to......test—but in the winter when only a few leaves remain on the tree they cannot afford to shâke it to test whether those last leaves would fall or not.

Hold the last fast—according to the rhymed proverb, no risk is to be taken with one's last, it may be money or anything else.

For my heart had......the rhyme—"For my heart then was in its prime, rich with all contentments and charms as is a forest in summer days. Now that those days are gone, I want you to stick fast to the best moment of that love's memory, not liking that it should be hampered by any other consideration. Love or friendship is like a tree in summer, you can shake the tree without the danger of leaving it completely bare—similarly there is a room for carefree adventures in the love of youthful days—but when there is just only one leaf left on the tree in winter one must avoid shaking it, lest that last leaf should fall down leaving the tree utterly bare, whence comes the rhymed proverb : "hold the last fast" Browning's use of vivid, picturesque images is to be noted. It is in this way that he communicates highly abstract concepts to his readers.

Stanza 42

To make your little much—to convert friendship into love.

Venture the tree and a myriad such—in spring the tree may be shaken. There is no harm in it, for the few leaves which fall down, will soon grow again. Similarly in youth there are ample opportunities for winning love, and so it does not matter much if a few opportunites are missed. The case is different in old age, when opportunites are rare, and so one should make the best of whatever chance one gets.

Mar—spoil ; shake from the tree. *But the year can mend*—can be made good very soon. *Fear to touch*—one should be very careful and do nothing which may harm the cause of true love.

Stanza 43

It—the last leaf. *Unfasten itself and fall*—fall down of its own accord. *It find your face*—falling from the tree, it is blown by the wind till it alights on the face of the beloved. *Best chance of all*—this is best that can happen to the last leaf.

To forestall—to prevent.

What does Browning mean by the 'last leaf' ? Most probably

he means the "last curtain of reserve", which slipping away from the face of the lady, makes them lovers. But it is not clear what exactly is implied by the 'last leaf' alighting on the face of the lady. The passage is obscure, and has not been satisfactorily explained so far.

Stanza 44

Worth how well—how very valuable. *That a man should...... agonise*—that a man should try hard, and suffer intense agony, to win over those eyes and those hair.

Taste a veriest hell on earth—suffer the tortures of Hell on this earth.

Of such a prize—in the hope of winning a lady with such beautiful eyes and hair.

Stanza 45

You might... a man—she might have tried and tested a lover who proposed to her.

Set him a......wear—you would have delayed and delayed, and in this way exhausted his patience.

And prove which......despair—you could have tried to find out whether his greatest happiness or his worst despair was more suited to you.

Yet end as he began—you could have rejected his proposal, thus leaving him in the same condition in which he was before.

Stanza 46

You spared me this—the poet had not to suffer all this torture. *Like the heart you are*—like the dear, kind-hearted lady that you are.

At a word—by speaking out only a word in acceptance of my love.

A scar—a spot ; a defect or injury. *A shodowy third......is too far*—"if a man and wife are imperfectly united, there is always near them the shadowy figure of the ideal unity they might have achieved". **(James Reeves)**

Stanza 47

A moment after—soon after, she had accepted his love. *Hands unseen......around us fast*—it seemed to them that some unseen power was trying to surround them with darkness. It seemed that the darkness of the forest was enveloping them.

A bar—a barrier, a screen which divided one life from another.

We were mixed at last—they had at last become spiritually one.

Mortal screen—the body, which separates one soul from another.

Stanza 48

The forests had done it—the forests with their mysterious surrounding had caused the mixing of their souls. *They*—forests. *We caught for a moment etc.*—for a second they came under the spell of these forests. *The powers at play*—the powerful influence of the forest. *They relapsed to their ancient mood*—they assumed their primitive silence ; they fell back into their elemental silence.

Stanza 49

How the world......of us—the external world effects the life and fortunes of each individual differently.

Tends to some......thus—leads to some such moment of happiness, as was experienced by the poet and his beloved.

When a soul declares itself—when a soul expresses its love for another, and thus the two souls become one.

To wit—that is to say. *By its fruit*—by the result of its actions ; through what is done by it.

Stanza 50

By hate that......that fruit—one's actions may express love or they may express hate. *It forwards the......man*—individual actions always effect the Destiny of mankind ; individual actions contribute to the onward march of humanity.

Each of the Many—each individual. *To recruit*—to contribute to the progress of.

Each living his own—each continues to live his own life, and also contributes to the life of mankind in general.

To boot—also, in addition to.

Stanza 51

That moment's—when you accepted my love. *Feat*—action ; deed. *My station and degree*—that determined my place and value in the world. *Grew my own small life complete*—my life was fulfilled. *Best of me*—I did the best thing for which I was sent to this world. *Sweet*—sweetheart.

Stanza 52

Propping—her brow was supported by her hand. This was the favourite posture of Mrs. Browning. *My heart......knows how*—I know how beautiful it is.

Stanza 53

By one man more—one man more has done his duty towards

the world. *The whole is well worth etc.*—the events of that day are worth thinking over in old age.

When autumn comes—in old age.

(*c*) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

By the Fire-side is one of the finest dramatic monologues of Browning. It was first published in *Men and Women* in 1853. The lyric is autobiographical through and through, and it throbs with the intensity of his love for his beloved wife Elizabeth Barrett. It is one of those rare poems in which Browning speaks in his own person, and expresses the most intimate feelings of his heart.

Critical Summary

In the monologue, the poet, now in middle age, is the speaker, and his beloved wife is the interlocutor or listener. The two sit by the fireside, and the poet pours out his very soul to her. "Here Browning traces the story of his courtship of Elizabeth in terms of a landscape which is at once a familiar Italian scene and a symbolic picture" (**James Reeves**). He recollects the circumstances and the confession of his first love for her in Italy. Looking forward into the future, he visualises his old age and its occupations. How he will be mainly preoccupied with his studies but his heart will be set on the old memories of his youth passed in Italy where he first declared his love to his beloved and won her to become his wife, and then he will reconstruct the whole natural set-up in its minutest detail—scent, colour and sound— as it was in this background that he won his bride. That landscape is an integral part of their supreme moment of happiness. According to **Mrs. Orr** the scenic background belongs to that of the chetunt-covered hills of Lucca. But allusions to Pella and the Alps suggest that the mountain gorge mentioned in the poem is somewhere near the Coldi Colma. Nature descriptions have been skilfully used to stimulate and intensify emotion.

The Personal Note

The monologue is a wonderfully ambitious personal poem, in which truth is skilfully coloured with imagination. The poet never deviates from emotional truth, not even for a moment, though the scene of his courtship of Elizabeth Barrett has been transferred from Wimpole Street to Italy. Emotional reality is a higher reality than factual reality, and the monologue has this higher reality. The poet speaks about his own life—his elopement with Elizabeth Barret whom he afterwards married—"my perfect wife, my Leonor" as he calls her in this poem. It depicts a perfect understanding between a middle-aged man and his wife. The poet looks forward to a

contetned old age, which he shall pass in studies but always in the company of his wife, who will be a continuing source of inspiration to him. All the while he will think of the first days of his married life and the beautiful scenes of Nature where he passed these days. "The bit of fresco over the porch of the now ruined chapel where on feast days the priest came to minister to the few people who lived nearabouts the date of its erection, the bird which sings there and the stray sheep which drink at the pond, the very midges dancing over the water, and the lichen clinging to the walls—all will be present (in his imagination), for it was there that heart was fused with the heart, and two souls were blent into one. Old age is dreaded by the young and the middle-aged, none care to think of it, but the speaker dreads it not, he has a soul companion from whom not even death can separate him, and with the memory of this moment of irrevocable union he can face the bonds of life undaunted. The moment, one and infinite to which both lives have tended, has wrought this happiness for him, that it would never cease to bear fruit, never cease to hallow and bless his spirit : the mountain stream had sought the lake below and had lost itself in its bosom ; two lives were joined in one without tending to a moment's product, with its infinite consequences—the completion, in this case, of his own small life, whereby Nature won her best from him in fitting him to love his wife. The whole poem is a confession of his love for her and its influence on his own spiritual development." (**Berdoe**)

As a Love-Lyric

Commenting on *By the Fire-side* as a love-lyric **E.D.H. Johnson** writes, "The central problem in Browning's love poetry is invariably one of communication between the sexes. The intangible influences which encourage or destroy intimacy between men and women elicit all his skill in psychological analysis ; for love exists in and through human intuitions. The poet believed that destined lovers recognize each other at first sight. But these moments of full and perfect communion are precarious ; and, save for the most exceptional cases, the initial harmony does not survive social pressures or the importunities of individual temperament. It is rare in Browning's work to find such a poem as *By the Fire-side* in which the lovers have so come to exist in each other that one of them can say :

When, if I think but deep enough
You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme ;
And you, too, find without rebuff
Response your soul seeks many a time
Piecing its fine flesh-stuff.

More commonly the good moment passes, as in *Two in the Campagna*, where we watch it slip away despite the lovers longing to prolong their felicity ; or *The Last Ride Together*, in which the speaker strives desperately to eternalize the fleeting moment he passes together with the woman he loves.

Ideal love is for Browning the consummation of an intuitive process by which the lovers transcend the barriers of their separate individualities and achieve spiritual union. Whenever this happens, it results in the most exquisite and productive form of communication possible between human beings. Browning's men and women, are always seeking to pierce the barrier which, in his favourite metaphor, separates two isolated souls reaching towards each other. In *by the Fire-side*, Browning, speaking for once in his own person, describes the loss of personal identity under love's mysterious spell, and the bliss that flows therefrom :

If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third ;
One near one is too far.
A moment after, and hands unseen.
Were hanging night around us fast ;
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life : we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

Despite its occasional obscurity, the lyric ranks very high in Browning's love-poetry.

31

A Lover's Quarrel

(*a*) THE POEM

Oh, what a dawn of day !
How the March sun feels like May !
All is blue again
After last night's rain,
And the South dries the hawthorn-spray.
Only, my Love's away !
I'd as lief that the blue were grey.

Runnels, which rillets swell,
Must be dancing down the dell
With a foamy head
On the beryl bed
Paven smooth as a hermit's cell ;
Each with a tale to tell,
Could my Love but attend as well.

Dearest, three months ago !
When we lived blocked-up with snow,—
When the wind would edge
In and in his wedge,
In, as far as the point could go—
Not to our ingle, though,
Where we loved each the other so !

Laughs with so little cause !
We devised games out of straws.
We would try and trace
One another's face
In the ash, as an artist draws ;
Free on each other's flaws,
How we chattered like two church daws !

What's in the 'Times ?'—a scold
At the emperor deep and cold ;
He has taken a bride
To his gruesome side,

That's as fair as himself is bold :
　　　　There they sit ermine-stoled,
And she powders her hair with gold.

Fancy the Pampas' sheen !
Miles and miles of gold and green
　　　　Where the sun-flowers blow
　　　　In a solid glow,
And to break now and then the screen—
　　　　Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between !

Try, will our table turn ?
Lay your hand there light, and yearn
　　　　Till the yearning slips
　　　　Thro' the finger tips
In a fire which a few discern,
　　　　And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn !

Then we would up and pace,
For a change, about the place,
　　　　Each with arm o'er neck.
　　　　'Tis our quarter-deck,
We are seamen in woeful case.
　　　　Help in the ocean-space !
Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

See, how she looks now, drest
In a sledging-cap and vest.
　　　　'Tis a huge fur clock—
　　　　Like a reindeer's yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast :
　　　　Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

Teach me to flirt a fan
As the Spanish ladies can,
　　　　Or I tint your lip
　　　　With a burnt stick's tip
And you turn into such a man !
　　　　Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.

Dearest, three months ago
When the mesmeriser Snow
　　　　With his hand's first sweep
　　　　Put the earth to sleep,
'Twas a time when the heart could show

All—how was earth to know,
'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro !

Dearest, three months ago
When we loved each other so,
Lived and loved the same
Till an evening came
When a shaft from the Devil's bow
Pierced to our ingle-glow,
And the friends were friend and foe !

Not from the heart beneath—
'Twas a bubble born of breath,
Neither sneer nor vaunt,
Nor reproach nor taunt.
See a word, how it severeth !
Oh, power of life and death
In the tongue, as the Preacher saith !

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last,
Me, your own, your you,—
Since, as Truth is true,
I was you all the happy past—
Me do you leave aghast
With the memories we amassed ?

Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
How I look to you
For the pure and true,
And the beauteous and the right,—
Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threats the white !

What of a hasty word ?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
By a worm's pin-prick
Where its roots are quick ?
See the eye, by a fly's-foot blurred—
Ear, when a straw is heard
Scratch the brain's cost of curd !

Foul be the world or fair,
More or less, how can I care ?
'Tis the world the same
For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.
Wrong in the one thing rare—
Oh, it is hard to bear !

Here's the spring back or close,
When the almond-blossom blows ;

We shall have the word
In that minor third
There is none but the cuckoo knows—
Heaps of the guelder-roses!
I must bear with it, suppose.

Could but November come,
Were the noisy birds struck dumb
At the warning slash
Of his driver's-lash—
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
Facing the castle glum
And the giant's fee-faw-fum !

Then, were the world well stript
Of the gear wherein equipped
We can stand apart,
Heart dispense with heart
In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—
Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
We were both in a bare-walled crypt !

Each in the crypt would cry
'But one freezes here ! and why ?
When a heart as chill
At my own would thrill
Back to life, and its fires out-fly ?
Heart, shall we live or die ?
The rest,......settle it by and by !'

So, she'd efface the score,
And forgive me as before.
Just at twelve o'clock
I shall hear her knock
In the worst of a storm's uproar—
I shall pull her through the door—
I shall have her for evermore !

(*b*) CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY COMMENTS

Stanza I

What a dawn of day—it is the beginning of spring. It is only the month of March. But already it is as hot as if it were full summer.

South—the southern wind, hot and dry. *The hawthorn spray*—the buds of hawthorn, a flowering plant.

Love—beloved. *Lief*—willingly ; gladly. The lover cannot enjoy the beauty of the spring without his beloved, so he would not mind, if instead of 'blue', it were 'grey', *i.e.* bad weather as in winter.

Stanza 2

Rillets—small, thin currents of water which increase the volume of Runnels by feeding them with their waters.

With a foaming head—covered with foam. *Beryl bed*—the grey-coloured bed of the rivers and streams is meant.

Each with a tale to tell—each of the streams as it danced along its way, tells its own tale. If his beloved were also with him, he would have listened to the tale. Now, alone he does no longer enjoy it or listen to it.

Stanza 3

Blocked-up with snow—confined to the four-walls, as it was snowing outside.

When the wind...could go—the cold piercing winter wind would enter into the house, as far as it could.

Ingle—the fire-place, where they sat loving each other.

Stanza 4

Games—ways of amusing ourselves. *Free on each others flaws*—they would freely drawn on the ash even the defects in each other's face. *Daw*—a small bird.

Laugh with so...church daws—the stanza gives an account of the various ways in which they amused themselves in those dark November days, when they were confined to the four walls because of bad weather outside. The account is continued in the following stanzas.

Stanza 5

The Times—an English Newspapers. *A scold*—a shrewish, quarrelsome woman.

The Emperor—the reference is to Napolean III of France, who was married in 1853.

Gruesome—blood-stained ; stained with the blood of many a battle.

Ermine-stoled—wrapped in a cloak of furs.

Stanza 6

Fancy—imagine. *Pampas*—open, grassy fields. *Sheen*—shining in the sun. *Gold and green*—green fields with golden sun-flowers.

Stanza 7

Table turn—"Florance, during the winter of 1852-53, had gone mad on the subject of spiritualism, rapping, and table-tipping". **(De Vane)**

Yearn—desire something. They pretended that they were trying their luck at table-tipping.

Stanza 8

It is our quarter-deck—they would pretend that they were on a ship.

In woeful case—in difficulty. *Help in the open-space*—they are in distress, and someone must come to their help and save them.

We will embrace—they will embrace and bid farewell to each other, as people do at the moment of death.

Stanza 9

Sledging cap and dress—the dress one wears when out for a drive in a sledge. Sledge is a dog-driven small carriage used for driving on the snow in European countries.

Lappet—a head-dress with a little lap or flap.

Stanza 10

Flirt—to play with ; to flatter. *Teach me*—she would teach me.

Tint your lip—blackened her upper lip to form a kind of moustache, so that she resembled a man.

Turn into such a man—she looked like a handsome man, because moustaches had been formed on her upper lip.

The two spots etc.—just two black spots such are to be seen on the bill of a male swan.

Stanza 11

Mesmeriser—a show of the art of Mesmer. The Austrian physician Mesmer was able to induce sleep or a state of trance in his patients by the movements of his hands. In this trance, they would answer questions put to them and thus reveal what was passing through the subconscious.

Sweep—movement. *Put the earth to sleep*—the snow is being compared to Dr. Mesmer, and is said to put the earth to sleep by a movement of his hands.

It was a time...all—just as the patient in a trance reveals the truth about his soul, so in the month of November they were in a trance induced by 'mesmeriser snow', and they too revealed all their soul to each other.

Mute hand—the hand of snow. *To end fro*—movement this way and that way.

Stanza 12

A shaft from the Devils bow—a harsh word, as if it were an arrow shot by the Devil.

To our ingle-glow—pierced to our comfortable life by the fire-place, and spoiled our happiness.

Were friend and foe—while he still remained a friend, still continued to love her, she was offended and turned an enemy. She rejected him, and turned away from him.

Stanza 13

Not from the heart beneath—the harsh word which offended her, did not come from his heart.

It was a bubble born of breath—it was vain and meaningless. It came only form his lips, and not from his heart.

Severeth—separates true lovers. *Power of life and death*—the reference is .the Proverbs, XVIII. *Preacher saith*—as has been said in *the Bible.*

Stanza 14

Cast—cast off ; reject.

Your you—your happy past, the source of all the hapiness you had known in the past.

Aghast—amazed ; wonder-struck. *With the...amassed*—with all the memories of the happy time they had passed together.

Stanza 15

Bear with a moments spite—not feel offended with a harsh word uttered in a moment of carelessness.

A mere mote threats the white—a mote may darken the eye for a moment, but it cannot obsure its brightness for any length of ture. Then why should a dark word, uttered by chance, be allowed to darken his life for ever.

Stanza 16

What of a hasty word ?—a hasty chance word does not matter much. Too much of importance must not be attached to it.

Is the fleshly...of curd—the hasty word, which stung and offended her, is here likened to the sting of a worm, to the foot of a fly and to a straw used to scratch the ear. Its effect should have been equally short-lived and superficial. She ought not to have taken it to heart.

Stanza 17

How can I care ?—the lover does not care for what the world thinks of him. Foul or fair, it is the same to him. The only thing which matters to him is the love of his beloved.

And endurance is easy there—he can easily endure hostility of the world. The praise or blame of the world is of no importance to him.

Wrong is the one thing rare—but he cannot endure to be misunderstood by his beloved. This is the one thing unbearable to him.

Stanza 18

Here is...close—the spring is approaching. *In the minor third*—a technical term in music. *We shall have...Cuckoo knows*—"as the cuckoo will announce the spring in the minor third of its peculiar notes. This is an example of Browning's fondness for musical terms." **(James Reeves)**

Guelder rose—a kind of wild-rose.

I must hear it—he would have liked it to be November when he was happy with his beloved. He does not like the spring for his beloved has left him. But he will have to endure it. There is no help to it, for the spring must come in the usual course of nature.

Stanza 19

Could but November come—the poet wishes it were the month of November when he was happy with his beloved.

At the warming...last—the snow is here called a driver with a whip, at whose approach the birds become silent with fear.

The Valiant Tumb, etc.—the reference is to the well-known story of Tom Thumb and the gaint. *Glum*—fearful ; terrible. *Fee-faw-fum*—blustering.

Stanza 20

Then—in November. *World well-stript*—if nature were again barse, stripped of all its spring clothing.

Gear—dress.

Equipped—dressed in ; provided with.

We can stand apart—in the spring all nature is dressed in her very best, but it is the season which separates true lovers. In spring they can be independent of each other ; but winter bring them together by isolating them from the outside, world and making them dependent on each other. So the lover does not like it. *Heart dispense with heart*—lovers can do without each other.

Unnipped—not striken by winter snow and frost.

Oh, the world's...Crypt—the poet wishes that it were the month of November, when all the finery in which Nature is dressed in spring would be torn away, and they would be able to live together once again in their secret cell or abode.

Crypt—a hidden cell or cave.

Stanza 21

But one...why?—Why should a heart freeze with cold, here?

At my own...to life—his own love would excite love in the heart of the beloved.

Its fires out-fly—the beloved will respond with all possible intensity to the love of the lover.

Shall we live or die?—in the cold winter months they can live only if each warms the other with his or her love. *Settle it by and by*—as regards their quarrel it will be settled at some other time.

Stanza 22

Efface the score—forget the word which had offended her.

Just at twelve o'clock—at the usual time.

I shall have her for evermore—they would then live together for ever. The lover strikes here an optimistic note. He is sure that she would come to him at the usual time, unmindful of hostile weather, and would never leave him again.

(c) INTRODUCTION AND APPRECIATION—CRITICAL SUMMARY

Introduction

A Lover's Quarrel is a dramatic monologue first published in *Men and Women* in 1855. The speaker is a lover whose beloved has left him after a quarrel caused by a rashly spoken word. The lover reveals the depth and intensity of his love, as he "contrasts the warmth of a love in winter with the chill that has arisen in spring because of a hasty word".

Critical Summary

James Reeves has summed up the poem admirably: "The weather is perfect, but the lovers have quarrelled. She has left him, and he had rather it were the weather in which they first met, for he cannot enjoy nature without her. Three months ago love made them secure against bad weather; idle diversions made them happy. They were like two people in a dream, sleeping as the earth sleeps under the spell of snow: how could they have any sense of insecurity? How were they to know that the devil of disagreement would pierce to the centre of their happiness and make her his enemy? It was a mere word that offended her, coming only from the lips and not the heart. He begged her not to let a moment's spite make her cast him off for ever. The world's praise or blame is of no importance, but he cannot bear to be misunderstood in 'the one thing rare', his love. Spring is approaching; only if November were here—then in adversity the lovers would find the mutual dependence which they did not feel in summer. In winter weather she would forgive him and they would be reunited."

Conclusion : The Note of Optimism

The monologue ends on a note of optimism, for the poet is sure that she would return to him at the usual hour, and forgive him for the rashly spoken word which had offended her. She would come to him even in the most inclement weather, even if a storm were raging outside. Then he would pull her in and says, he, "I shall have her for evermore". The intensity of the lover's passion strikes a sympathetic chord in the heart of the readers. Browning finds some good even in things evil, and here we almost agree with the lover that the bleak and barren winter is to be perferred to the gay spring. It is an emotional situation from common everyday life, but its treatment is original and illuminating. It may also be mentioned that the love-lyric is entirely free from the usual obsurities of Browning.

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Select Literary Criticism

(1)

The world is for Browning, in Keats' phrase, the "valley of soul-making", and every act, thought, and feeling of life is of concern only as it hinders or determines the soul on its course. To him love is the supreme experience and function of the soul, testing its temper and revealing its probable fate. In *Cristina*, *Evelyn Hope*, *The Last Ride Together*, *My Star*, *By the Fireside*, and many more, he has presented love in its varied phases and has celebrated its manifold meanings not only to earth but in the infinite range of worlds through which he believes that the soul is destined to go in search after its own prefection. —*Moody and Lovett*

(2)

Love is a word of all work, as George Eliot said, and there are forms of love—love of country, love of family, the manly love of comrades—about which Browning says little or nothing. The love he writes of is love between man and woman, and that he knows in many phases, from the fierce animal passion of Ottima, in *Pippa Passes* to the romantic love ("Queen Worship" as he called it) so exquisitely rendered in *The Last Ride Together* and *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*. The natural end of such love is marriage, and Browning, like Donne in an earlier age, is the chosen poet of wedded love.

—*Grierson*

(3)

This (the dramatic Monologue) is a kind of comprehensive soliloquy, absorbing into its substance by the speaker's keenly observant glance, the surrounding scenery and audience bringing all that is pertinent to the chosen moment by the channels of memory, argument, curiosity and association ; adding through the deep-graven lines which habit has incised upon character much which the soul would fain conceal, or is even more unconscious of the necessity for concealing ; and enriching the current of self-revealing speech with the product of any other emotion which may have been powerful enough to share in the fashioning of this critical moment. —*E.T. Young*

(4)

Browning's poems vary in quality at least as widely as Tennyson's ; and there are differences in tone between the works of one period as a whole and those of another. But there is no such revolution as that which is implied in the development of the dramatic element in Tennyson. On the contrary, the principle upon which Browning's work is based remains singularly uniform from beginning to end : he never swerved from the conviction that his genius was fundamentally dramatic. He contrasts with Tennyson also in his remarkable independence. Only a few great poets owe so much to their predecessors as Tennyson, while hardly any are so entirely self-sustained as Browning. Tennyson is full of echoes from the classics, but though Browning knew all the Greek and Latin poets, there are few lines or phrases in his works which can be traced back to them. Browning could, when he pleased, interweave among his lines literary reminiscenes drawn from his vast reading. But his method of conception was essentially his own, and his work did not readily amalgamate with the work of others. The echoes of Shelley in his early poetry seem not quite in keeping with the context. He left the incongruity, and early learnt to rely upon himself alone.

—*Hugh Walker*

(5)

We reach the culmination in *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, one of the greatest poems Browning ever wrote. It is put into the mouth of a Jew ; but for once Browning is not anxious to individualise, his aim is rather to idealise. Rabbi Ben Ezra is an old man, the type of all that is best and wisest in his race. There is no dogma in his utterances, nothing distinctive of the Jewish or even of the Christian faith. What he says might be appropriately put into the mouth of a Socrates or of a St. Francis of Assisi ; for the purest religion is of any creed, or of none. The poem is the embodiment of all that is deepest in Browning's philosophy of religion, and all that is highest in his morality. Nowhere else, except in the Pope of *The Ring and the Book*, can we be so sure that we have Browning's own thought, just the best that he can conceive, unaltered and unmodified by dramatic conditions. What induced Browning to ascribe these thoughts to Rabbi Ben Ezra may have been the fact that the Rabbi was one of those Jews who taught the doctrine of immortality ; for this is the teaching of the poem too. No more confident and triumphant poem was ever written; it has the magnificent faith of certain of *the Psalms*. The Rabbi welcomes age : it is "*the last of life, for which the first was made*". He welcomes pain and doubt : they indicate kinship to God, closer than that of the brutes which are undisturbed by them. He refuses to accept, '*apparent failure*' : better high aim than low achievement—"*a brute I might have been, but would not sink in the scale*". And all is summed up in the doctrine of a universe divinely governed.

—*Hugh Walker*

(6)

Except for such superficial points, Browning has perhaps less of the mediaeval spirit than any other poet of his time. He has been called a mystic, but the word hardly fits : and in any case the mysticism with which he sympathises is not of the mediaeval sort ; it is transcendentalism rather than mysticism. He remains singularly unmoved by the religious revival, or reaction, which so powerfully influenced the imagination of the Pre-Raphelites: and large as is the place filled by religion in his verse, there is hardly a piece that is 'catholic' in a sense which would have satisfied Newman or Manning. To them, dogma and authority were essential: to Browning, they were an obstruction. Even his Pope is almost as free from them as his Rabbi Ben Ezra : he is universal, but not 'catholic'.

Just as little is Browning attracted by the system of chivalry. We hear little in his verse of tournaments and feats of arms. A deed of heroism or devotion appeals to him no more in the knightly Couno Gismond vindicating a lady's honour than in the simple Breton sailor, Herve Riel, steering the fleet of his country into safety and if in the former he seems to stamp the chivalric spirit with his approval, in *The Glove* he reveals one of the absurdities to which it was apt to lead. Mere daring had for him only the attraction which he felt towards any form of intense life; he preferred infinitely themes which opened out some problem beyond, like that of *Clive*. And just as he cared little for the warlike side of the spirit of chivalry, so he was indifferent to its amatory aspect. There is nothing in common between the love-poems of Browning and those of the troubadours and the fantastic devotion of the knights to their ladies was more likely to stir him to contempt than to win his admiration.

Instead, then, of representing Browning as a master of the lore of the Middle Ages, it seems more consistent with the facts to say that no man of his time was more completely free from their influence. This was not due to ignorance ; it was rather due to alter nation of mind. —*Hugh Walker*

(7)

There is no nineteenth-century poet of the first rank whose ultimate position in the hierarchy is so doubtful as Browning's. He is at once astonishingly great and astonishingly faulty ; and only time can determine how far the faults will blur and obscure the greatness. On the one hand, in his finest pieces he sweeps the reader away with him as Tennyson rarely does ; and he is incomparably more original in thought. On the other hand, for every sin against art which blot the pages of Tennyson, a hundred blot those of Browning: and his very originality leads him into those irritating eccentricities to which reference has already been made. His style and rhythm are often intolerably rough and unmusical. He is full of stained expressions, irritating puns, harsh inversions. He has a

provoking and really meaningless habit of clipping the particles,—"as we curtail the already curtailed cur". Worst of all, perhaps, is his inability to select the essential and to reject the unimportant. He pours out the whole farrago of his thoughts and sometimes does not take the trouble to set them in order. This is the meaning of the charge of verbosity which has been brought against him. He is not verbose in the sense that he takes many words to express a given idea: on the contrary, he is often condensed even to a fault. But he is verbose in the sense that he gives expression to many thoughts when a few would suffice: the total effect might be produced in less space then he takes. A conspicuous example is, *The Ring and the Book*, one-half of which adds nothing that is of the slightest importance. Browning is in danger, therefore, of being smothered by his own luxuriance. No one who carefully observes what has lived and what has failed to live in past literature will dispute that faults such as these are a dangerous burden for the back of any author. The world is busy, and it will read short books in preference to long ones. *The Ring and the Book* would stand a better chance of being remembered if it extended only to 10,000 lines, instead of containing more than 20,000. Happily, in this case each reader may easily make the reduction for himself; but there are numerous other instances in which the weeding out is less easily performed.

Again, the needless harshness and obscurity of Browning will tell seriously against him. The poets who have melody, who are lucid in expression, who have classical finish, are sure to find readers. Virgil and Milton are perennial. Imperial Rome has passed away, but *the Aneid* remains. No one will turn to *the Georgics* now for instruction in agriculture; but the verse evoked by the statesmanship of Maecenas has long survived the statesman and his purpose. Milton's Puritan theology is obsolete; but the majestic lines of *Paradise Lost* live, not because but in spite of it. Tennyson in a less degree has the same assurance of vitality. He is not the equal of Virgil or of Milton, and he carries seeds of decay from which they are free; but he belongs to their corps. Pope is a lesser poet then Tennyson. A century age the tide set strongly against him; half a century ago he seemed well on the way to oblivion. But his faith in the merit of expressing old thoughts better than they have ever been expressed has been justified: he refuses to be forgotten: we still quote: "*willing to wound, but yet afraid to strike*"; "*true art is nature to advantage drest*"; "*die of a rose in aromatic pain*"; "*means not, but blunders round about a meaning*"; "*the right divine of kings to govern wrong*"; we read more than our fathers did the polished couplets of the *Essay on Man*, the *Essay on Criticism* and the *Moral Essays*.

New Browning is in this the antithesis to Pope. He is careful of the thought, but careless of the expression. It seems the wise and right and manly choice—that is, if for any reason it is

impossible to make both perfect. Yet it is questionable whether it is the choice which makes for permanence of fame. Aristotle has survived for two thousand years without a style at all ; but the examples are rare indeed of such survival. Browning has many poems in which beauty of style in conjoined with profundity of thought, and in these poems lies the hope for the permanence of his fame. *But he drags in his train a most dangerous mass of impedimenta. Probably no greater service could be done to his memory than to disencumber him of it and to make a selection of his best poems such as Arnold made for Wordsworth.* —*Hugh Walker*

(8)

Browning's style has been the subject of endless discussion, for it presents a fascinating problem. Attempts to elucidate his more obscure passages have sometimes led to a neglect of his very real poetic qualities. At his worst, his poems are a series of bewildering mental acrobatics, expressed in a wilfully harsh rhythm and a verbal music as good as anything produced by that master of melody, Tennyson. Above all, his verse reflects the abundant vitality of his character. He is master of a surprising variety of metrical forms and excels in the manipulation of rythmic effects. In this greatest work even the notorious rugged angularity of his phrasing and vocabulary is turned to account and produces a beauty peculiarly its own. —*E. Albert*

(9)

The chief difficulty in reading Browning is the obscurity of his style, which the critics of half a century ago held up to ridicule. Their attitude towards the poet's early work may be inferred from Tennyson's humorous criticism of *Sordello*. It may be remembered that the first line of this obscure poem is, "*Who will may hear Sordello's story told*" ; and that the last line is, "*Who would have heard Sordello's story told*". Tennyson remarked that these were the only lines in the whole poem that he understood, and that they were evidently both lies. If we attempt to explain this obscurity, which puzzled Tennyson and many less friendly critics, we find that it has many sources. First, the poet's thought is often obscure, or else so extremely subtle that language expresses it imperfectly. Secondly, Browning is led from one thing to another by his own mental associations and forgets that the reader's associations may be of an entirely different kind. Thirdly, Browning is careless in his English, and frequently clips his speech, giving us a series of ejaculations. As we do not quite understand his processes of thought, we must stop between the ejaculations to trace out the connections. Fourth, Browning's allusions are often far-fetched, referring to some odd scrap of information which he has picked up in his wide reading, and the ordinary reader finds it difficult to trace and understand them. Finally, Browning wrote too much and revised too little. The time which he should have given to making one thought clear was used in expressing other thoughts that flitted through his head like a

flock of swallows. His field was the individual soul, never exactly alike in any two men, and he sought to express the hidden motives and principles which govern individual action. In this field he is like a miner delving underground, sending up masses of mingled earth and ore ; and the reader must sift all this material to separate the gold from the dross.

Here, certainly, are sufficient reasons for Browning's obscurity ; and we must add the word that the fault seems unpardonable, for the simple reason that Browning shows himself, at times, of writing directly, melodiously, and with noble simplicity. —*Long*

(10)

Browning's place in our literature will be better appreciated by comparison with his friend Tennyson, whom we have just studied. In one respect, at least, these poets are in perfect accord. Each finds in love the supreme purpose and meaning of life. In other respects, especially in their methods of approaching the truth, the two men are the exact opposites. Tennyson is first the artist and then the teacher ; but with Browning the message is always the important thing, and he is careless, too careless, of the form in which it is expressed. Again, Tennyson is under the influence of the romantic revival, and chooses his subjects daintily ; but 'all's fish' that comes to Browning's net. He takes comely and ugly subjects with equal pleasure, and aims to show that truth lies hidden in both the evil and the good. This contrast is all the more striking when we remember that Browning's essentially scientific attitude was taken by a man who refused to study science. Tennyson, whose work is always artistic, never studied art, but was devoted to the sciences : while Browning, whose work is seldom artistic in form, thought that art was the most suitable subject for a man's study.

The two poets differ even more widely in their respective messages. Tennyson's message reflects the growing order of the age, and is summed up in the word 'law'. In his view, the individual will must be suppressed ; the self must always be subordinate. His resignation is at times almost oriental in its fatalism, and occasionally it suggests Schopenhauer in its mixture of fate and pessimism Browning's message, on the other hand, is the triumph of the individual will over all obstacles ; the self is not subordinate but supreme. There is nothing Oriental, nothing doubtful, nothing pessimistic in the whole range of his poetry. His is the voice of the Anglo-Saxon, standing up in the face of all obstacles and saying, 'I can and I will'. He is, therefore, far radically English than is Tennyson ; and it may be for this reason that he is the more studied, and that while youth delights in Tennyson, manhood is better satisfied with Browning. Because of his invincible will and optimism, Browning is at present regarded as the poet who has spoken the strongest word of faith to an age of doubt. His energy, his cheerful courage, his faith in life and in the development that awaits us beyond the portals of

death, are like bugle-call to good living. This sums up his present influence upon the minds of those who have learned to appreciate him. Of the future we can only say that, both at home and abroad, he seems to be gaining steadily in appreciation as the years go by.

—*Long*

(11)

We shall find a more delicate grace in Tennyson, a more voluptuous intensity in Rossetti, an easier sweep in Byron, a more ideal beauty in Shelley, but in no one poet is there a more complete fusion of all these qualities than in Browning. The mystic side of passion is suggested tenderly and wistfully in *Evelyn Hope*, more in *Two in the Campagna.* In both, love is an ideal as well as a present actuality, and being an ideal its satisfaction is ever incomplete—"infinite passion and the pain of finite hearts that yearns"—hence the divine restlessness of the human heart. The elusiveness of love is more fancifully dealt with in *Love in a Life* and *Life in a Love.* The lover is always seeking for the loved one throughout the rooms of the house, never finding, yet the pursuit itself gives a meaning and purpose to life. Again, in *Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli*, the troubadour never sees the lady. Is she not a beautiful dream of his own making ? But the dream encompasses his life and art none the less : love for love's sake.

Love is so compelling, so transforming that no quarrel can withstand it ! That is the burden of *A Lover's Quarrel.* A chance word, an idle exclamation, has caused a separation. But it will come right. She must return, of that he is confident. For, as he tells us in *Natural Magic*, Love is the great magician, clothing the bareness of earth with the glory of summer. —*Compton-Rickett*

(12)

It is impossible in this brief retrospect to deal adequately with the great wealth of Browning's pictures of human nature ; but in the four poems just alluded to his powers are employed to the fullest extent : and, the key to all may be found in *How it Strikes a Contemporary* : where the poet—the only poet the speaker ever knew—"took such cognizance of man and things"—"scenting the world looking it full in face". This is the secret of the poet's insight ; he does not merely glance at the life about him, he 'takes cognizance'. The psychologist is at work in the early poems, not with complete success ; in the dramas with finer insight and mastery ; in *The Ring and the Book* his power as psychologist is supreme. What gives him this insight ? Observation—patient, critical, thoughtful observation ? To a great extent yes ; not entirely. Once again, it is his belief in love that gives the touch of greatness to these studies. When passion is absent, or is put aside, the insight into character is less profound, less illuminating. This may be seen by

glancing at his poems on art. Their importance does not lie in the poet's sensibility to beauty. Response as to what is beautiful in life is the guerdon of every poet worth his salt. Some, like Spenser, Keats and Rossetti, made it their creed, their religion.

Browning ignored the senses no more than did Keats. He gloried in the form of things ; he revelled in the delights of sound, sight and touch—but he went further.

We approach the truth of things by way of enjoyment ; and having gained insight by sheer enjoyment of the outward show we intensify our vision by relating enjoyment to character ; by relating the beautiful thing with the soul of the man who made it a beautiful thing. It is no slight testimony to the range of Browning's powers that the man who so often ignored beauty of form himself should know so much about ; but we shall cease to be surprised when we remember that the analyst of modern ethical and religious problems is also the poet of the Renascence and its glories, and the critical interpreter of Greek life and thought. —*Compton-Rickett*

(13)

For all his writings are experimental studies in spiritual experience : whether he deals with love, or patriotism, or intellectual ambition, or artistic passion, or religious aspiration, it is all brought to one common denominator—its effect upon character, its value in the making of the soul. This is his aim, as the method and form which he adopted to formulate his aim. He deals with spiritual experience in two ways, as a dramatic singer. He will flame out to a single mood, and throw all his imaginative power and beauty into that mood ; or he will disentangle for you half a dozen moods, and put them before you, for your, intellectual appreciation. But whatever method he adopts, he supplies the key, lest you be deafened by the babel of tongues.

Confusing as life may be, bewildering in its mingling of good and evil, the lovely and the ugly, of despair and hopefulness, it must be fought through ; we must not pick and choose, nor elect merely the sunny side of the road, but take everything. Work......yes ; and work means work out. Only by testing and using errors can you realise they are errors. If they are errors, they will crumble of themselves. Only by experience can we wring knowledge from ignorance.

A sound workaday criterion, and assuredly a buoyant and virile one :

"*Man—creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,*
And in this striving......
Finds progress......
Man's distinctive mark alone."

Browning's philosophy of life is essentially what we should call to-day pragmatic. Is your view a sound one ? Act as if it were :

put it to the test of practical experience : that is the only reliable criterion. This roughly is what he says in effect. For the rest, Browning's sanguine temperament led him naturally to took at the brighter side of things ; while his splendid vitality made of him a spiritual knight-errant, delighting in the possibilities of conflict, and never so happy as when engaged in some moral or intellectual 'scrap'. This is the secret of his optimism : a remarkably good blood supply and a natural taste for essaying the high impossible things of life. Unlike some spiritual voyagers in our literature, he never hugged the shore, but sailed for the open, loving the salt sting of the buffeting waves. A courageous soul, and a vigorous and vital comrade for these suffering from spiritual anaemia. —*Compton-Rickett*

(14)

In contrast with Tennyson, Browning was bold, rugged, and altogether unconventional, in matter and style, and though never careless in his writing (as is sometimes erroneously supposed), he was too vehement, and too impatient to bestow time and effort upon the polishing of his verse. Much of his work—and especially of his later work—is in consequence prolix and ill-digested ; it is often also marred by harshness and crudities of expression and by faults in taste ; while despite the heroic attempts of some of his more extravagant admirers to rebut the charge, the obscurity of not a little of his production cannot be denied. But notwithstanding many obvious defects, his greatness as a poet is quite beyond dispute ; and though it is necessary to qualify the claims put forth by adherents of the 'Browning cult', critics of all schools now combine in recognising the supreme strength and beauty, and the enduring poetic value, of what is best—and of this there is much—in his work. —*Hudson*

(15)

His genius was essentially dramatic ; but as his interest was centred throughout in the moral and spiritual forces and conflicts of individual men and women rather than in the world of action, it was not through the machinery of the regular stage-play that he found his most natural outlet. His characteristic art-form (a form which has been used by other poets, but by none so effectively), was the detached speech, or dramatic monologue, in which he takes some striking individual—generally at a critical moment—and instead of dissecting him from the outside, as the ordinary novelist would do, penetrates to the depth of his nature and through his own utterances compels him to reveal the innermost secrets of his life. Psychological insight, analytical subtlety, and power of dramatic interpretation are among the main features of Browning's poetry ; splendid examples of his method are to be found in many of the poems in *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personae* ; while, except for the introduction and conclusion this is the method adopted in the largest (if not the greatest) of his works, *The Ring and the Book*.

As a moralist and religious teacher Browning held a very distinct place among the writers of the Victorian Age. An uncompromising foe of scientific materialism. he preached God and immortality as the central truths of his philosophy of life, and he preached them as one absolutely assured of their reality. Nor was it only the negations of the current philosophy that he challenged. His poetry was throughout a protest also against the pessimistic mood engendered by them. The melancholy, hesitating spirit so often expressed by Tennyson finds no place in his verse, and he looked boldly at the evil of existence without for a moment losing his robustly optimistic faith. 'Hope hard in the subtle thing that's spirit', was the note of his message to his generation ; and to the many about him who were asking doubtfully whether after all life was really worth the living, he gave answer in the words of his Pippa—*'God's in his heaven—all's right with world'.*

—*Hudson*

(16)

Browning's typical form, that towards which all the other forms may be said to converge, is the monologue ; there properly resides the newness of his art. His main idea is to throw light upon the realm of conseiousness, and to do this he frees himself from all the shackles which impede psychological analysis, whether they are connected with action and narration, or the laws of material probability, and the various occasions when the external world in actual life obstructs and obscures that of the spirit. The novel and even the drama cannot preserve an important, often a dominant place, for this element of circumstance. The psychologist find full liberty only in the direct and individual expression of each being. The degree of clearness indispensable to this expression can be reached only through the actual hold which each personality has upon the states of its inner life. And as the psychologist's curiosity is infinite, Browning gives free vent to his imagination, roams through time and space, and selects in history and among the intense possibilities of life whatever cases attract him, either by their strong normality, or by virtue of their exceptional value ; the common feature of all the characters chosen being the inherent complexity which they possess, and which they realize themselves, or offer as a rich material to be exploited by the scrutinizing eye that can read them more clearly.

The fault of the method lies in this last point. It is very rarey that one can, or that one wants to, probe deeply into one's own consciousness. The monologue of classical tragedy had already fallen into discredit because of its artificiality. The kind of thinking aloud, meant to explain for the spectator's benefit a simple feeling or the moral position of an actor at a given time in the play, did not correspond very well to the illusion which the drama intended to create. But at least there was no attempt in this to explore all the inner being. It only aimed at revealing the secred of a certain attitude, the course and result of deliberation, at communicating verbally a

factor of the situation which the plot did not actually display on the stage. Now in the monologue of Browning, infinitely more adaptable and free from the conventional atmosphere as well as from the dialectics imposed by tradition on orthodox tragedy, there is no less artificiality, indeed there is more. He ambition is very much greater, he wants to investigate the whole province of the soul, and the interplay of its reactions to influence of environment ; the actual drama is left out ; with the result that our knowledge of the facts, of the conflict and of the other characters, comes to us by way of one single voice ; all the multiplicity of reality is seen from one unique angle of vision. For this formula in art to work, we must frankly leave aside the idea of likelihood, and of anything to concrete life. We do not hear the spontaneous utterance of a living being ; it is not the soliloquy of a soul that we suddenly came upon ; it is rather a self disclosure in which we have the collaboration of analyst at work. The confession, if we may so term it, is guided by a purpose of explanation, interpretation, and appreciation ; and we do not feel that we have before us a human soul unwittingly revealing itself, but a psychologist who is dissecting and a moralist who is judging it.

—*Legouis and Cazamian*

(17)

No stronger contrast could be imagined than that between Tennyson and his great contemporary, Robert Browning. Tennyson was representative of his age ; he speaks with the accent of his age, and concerned himself immediately with its problems. Browning is of all poets the most independent of his time. He takes his subjects from all ages, and treats all alike as if he were a contemporary. Though Italy was for many years his home, his work bears few traces of Italy's contemporary struggle for feedom. He felt, of course, the stir of the ideas of his time ; but their influence is less directly obvious in his work than in any other poet's. Again Tennyson was not merely an English, but a European poet. Browning, in spite of his cosmopolitan inrterests, has peculiarities of style and outlook that make him inaccessible to the great bulk of foreigners. And the reason of this difference is easy to see. Tennyson is, perhaps, the most limpid of English poets, Browning the most difficult. Tennyson was classic in his sympathies. He was interested in the form of his utterances least as much as in their matter and perfected that form with infinite labour and exquisite literary taste. Browning was pre-occupied with the matter of his poems ; he had too much to say to trouble about prefection of form and, so long as his meaning got itself expressed somehow, was satisfied. He had neither Tennyson's ear for verbal music nor the same sense for literal form. His verbal felicities seem accidental, not the result of premediated art. But he had much the more powerful intellect of the two, much the greater capacity for, and insight into, passion.

—*S.A. Brooke*

Fra Lippo Lippi

(*a*) The Poem

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave !
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame ? you think you see a monk !
What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar ?
The Carmine's my cloister : hunt it up,
Do, harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, *weke*, that's crept to keep him company !
Aha, you know your betters ! Then, you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I ?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off—he's a certain...how d'ye call ?
Master a...Cosimo of the Medici,
I' the house that caps the corner. Boh ! you were best !
Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe !

But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you :
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net ?
He's Judas to a title, that man is !
Just such a face ! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I'm not angry ! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads ! more beside !)

And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern,- for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand ('Look you, now,' as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped !
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like ? or you should see !
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.

What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you ? like enough !
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night—
Ouf ! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whifts of song,—
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb !
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since ?
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,— three slim shapes,
And a face that looked up...zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
That's all I'm made of ! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder ! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose,
If I've been merry, what matter who knows ?

And so as I was stealing back again
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go to work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see !
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
Mine's shaved a monk, you say the sting's in that !

If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum's the word, naturally ; but a monk !
Come, what am I a beast for ? tell us, now !

I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,

While I stood munching my first bread that month :
'So, boy, you're minded', quoth the good fat father
Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time',—
'To quit this very miserable world ?
Will you renounce'...'the mouthful of bread?' thought I;
By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to all at eight years old.

Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside!
'Let's see what the urchin's fit for'—that came next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do! They tried me with their books :
Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, 'amo' I love !

But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains, —
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped, –
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street, —
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less

For admonition from the hunger-pinch.

I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge.
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
'Nay,' quoth the Prior, 'turn him out, d'ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!'

And hereupon he bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little childern round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.

I painted all, then cried ''Tis ask and have;
Choose, for more's ready!' – laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies,– 'That's the very man!
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
To care about his asthma : it's the life!'
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funked ;
Their betters took their turn to see and say:

The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. 'How? what's here?
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all !
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke...no, it's not...
It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It's...well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
Gives as no more of body than shows soul!
Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
That sets us praising,—why not stop with him?
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub all out, try at it a second time.
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece...Herodias, I would say,—
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off !
Have it all out !' Now, is this sense, I ask ?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse ! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks nought.
Why can't painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order ? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece...patron-saint—is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy ? won't beauty go with these ?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them three-fold ?
Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents :
That's somewhat : and you'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.

'Rub all out !' Well, well, there's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since,

I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds :
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
I'm my own master, paint now as I please –
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house !
Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front –
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse !
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still - 'It's art's decline, my son !
You're not of the true painters, great and old ;
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find ;
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer :
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third !'
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr…manners, and I'll stick to mine !
I'm not the third, then : bless us, they must know !

Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
They with their Latin ? So, I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them sometimes do and sometimes don't ;
For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints –,
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world –
(*Flower o' the peach,*
Death for us all, and his own life for each !)
And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage ! The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have ? Do they like grass or no –
May they or mayn't they ? all I want's the thing
Settled for ever one way. As it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself :
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly detestable.

For me, I think I speak as I was taught ;
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife : and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards,

You understand me : I'm a beast, I know.
But see, now why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop :
His name is Guidi he'll not mind the monks -
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk –
He picks my practice up he'll paint apace,
I hope so - though I never live so long,
I know what's sure to follow. You be judge !

You speak no Latin more then I, belike ;
However, you're my man, you've seen the world
– The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all !
– For what ? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to ? What's it all about ?
To be passed over, despised ? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at ? oh, this last of course !—you say.
But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it ?
God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, 'His works
Are here already ; nature is complete :
Suppose your reproduce her—(which you can't)
There's no advantage ! you must beat her, then.'
For, don't you mark ? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that ;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face ? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though ! How much more,
If I drew higher things with the same truth !
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you ! Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves ! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

'Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer !'
Strikes in the Prior : 'when your meaning's plain

It does not say to folk · remember matins,
Or, mind you fast next Friday !' Why, for this
What need of art at all ? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style :
'How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down ?'
I ask a brother : 'Hugely,' he returns –
'Already not one phiz of your three slaves
Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
The pious people have so eased their own
With coming to say prayers there in a rage :
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
Your painting serves its purpose !' Hang the fools !
—That is – you'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine !
Oh, the church knows ! don't misreport me, now !
It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself :
And hearken how I plot to make amends.

I have bethought me : I shall paint a piece
...There's for you ! Give me six months, then go, see
Something in Sant' Ambrogio's. Bless the nuns !
They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two –
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz (and Us without the z'
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
Secured at their devotion, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo ! I ! –
Mazed, motionless and moonstruck – I'm the man !
Back I shrink what is this I see and hear ?

I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company !
Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape ?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast !"
—Addresses the celestial presence, 'nay—
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you ! Could Saint John there draw—
His camel-hair make up a painting-brush ?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus !' So, all smile—
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband ! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece...Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so al 's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence !
Your hand, sir, and good-bye : no lights, no lights !
The street's hushed, and I know my own way back
Don't fear me ! There's the grey beginning, Zooks !

(*b*) Introduction and Appreciation—Development of Thought—Critical Commentary

Introduction

Fra Lippo Lippi is one of the most successful, most lively and most characteristic of the dramatic monologues of Browning. Fra Lippo is the speaker, and the group of watchmen who arrest him are the listeners or the interlocutors. It was first published in *Men and Women*. It has 392 lines, all blank verse, save the six and one-half *stornelli*, or flower-songs. The poem might have been inspired by the poet's visit to Florence where he saw *The Coronation of the Virgin*, a picture which, in the poem, Fra Lippo promises to paint in six months.

Life and Character of Fra Lippo

The poem is a dramatic presentation of the life and doings of Fra Lippo, the great Italian painter who broke away from the moral and religious tradition in painting and ushered in a more realistic,

warm and life-like artistic manner. Giving an account of his life **Edward Berdoe** tells us that, "Fra Lippo Lippi (1412-69), the painter, was the son of a butcher in Florence. His mother died while he was a baby, and his father two years later. His aunt, Monna Lapaccia,. took him to her home, but in 1420, when the boy was but eight years old, placed him in the monastery of the Carmelites. He stayed at the monastery till 1432, and there became a painter. He seems to have ultimately received a more or less complete dispensation from his religious vows. In 1452 he was appointed chaplain to the convent of St. Giovannino in Florence, and in 1457 he was made rector of St. Quirico at Legnais. At this time he made a large income, but ever and again fell into poverty, probably on account of the numerous love-affairs in which he was constantly indulging."

Development of Thought

The poem opens dramatically in the characteristic manner of Browning, and the attention of the readers is at once captured. Brother Lippo is arrested by a group of watchmen, at mid of night in a lane of ill-repute, frequented by prostitutes. It is really disgraceful for a monk to be caught under such circumstances, but Lippo, with a keen zest for life, is not at all ashamed but proceeds to tell the watch the circumstances of his life and how he is obliged now and then to seek relief in adventures like the one in which they have just caught him. "The opening of the poem", says **Mark Roberts**, "is a good example of the way Browning sets a scene, and gives us information. In the first line, for example, the word 'brother' indicates that the speaker is a monk, this is confirmed in line 3. 'Torches' in line 2 suggests that the time is night, this is confirmed in line 4. But who are these people who clap their torches to the monk's face ? The fourth line tells us that it is a group 'going the rounds'—the watch, in fact. And why do they treat Lippo in this way ? Apparently because of where he has been found—in an area of 'ill-repute'—where anyone might be questioned, and certainly a man in the holy dress of a monk." But Lippo is not ashamed, he tells the watch angrily :

Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe !

(One of the watch, as we were told earlier, has taken hold of Lippo's throat.) But not only is Lippo not ashamed or put out in any way ; his professional interest in the faces about him almost immediately shows itself, and he interrupts the flow of abuse to which he has been treating the watch with,

He's Judas to a title, that man is !
Just such a face ! why, Sir, you make amends.

The person addressed makes amends by looking what Judas Iscariot ought to look like : doubtless the face will appear in some future painting.

The result is that the watch asks him if he is the painter. Having confirmed that he is, Lippo goes on to describe something of his life to his interested audience. For long he had been painting pictures for a local nobleman. Tonight he suddenly felt that for the time being he had worked long enough. Leaning out of the window to get some fresh air, his attention was caught by a knot of women running past. This was too much for him. Lippo describes in lines interspersed with snatches from popular love-songs how he tied his sheets together, slid down them to the ground, and set off in pursuit of the women.

Clearly Lippo is, by our standards, an unusual sort of monk. Indeed, we might ask why he is a monk at all. Because, he tells the watch, when he was very young both his parents died, and 'Old Aunt Lapaccia' took him along to the monastery to prevent his being starved to death. Realising that by so doing he would get enough to eat, the young Lippo readily agreed to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil. As he got older, he showed that he was not much good at most of the things required of a monk (*All the Latin I construe is, 'amo', I love !*) but he had a talent for painting, which the monks encouraged. But of course Lippo must not only paint ; he must try to paint the way the monks want him to paint. This is the difficulty, for although the ordinary monks are astonished at the life-likeness of his work, it is precisely this that provokes the objections of the Prior. He says, on seeing Lippo's work :

Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh,
Your business is to paint the souls of men.

"The Prior's view and Browning intends it to be taken as typical of the attitude of the authorities in Lippo's time - is that one should look through representations of created things up to the creator who produced those things : Lippo's paintings arrest the mind, ensnare it in the contemplation of visible appearances and particularly of the skill with which the reality of the chosen subject is reproduced. Caught in that sensual music, the man who looks at Lippo's pictures does not rise to the contemplation of 'soul', or of things divine. Lippo, however, asks,

...Now, is this sense, I ask ?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there must go further
And can't fare worse !

But does the beauty of visible appearance, or the representation of that beauty, prevent the artist from putting 'soul' into his picture as well ? Why not have both ? Lippo's real answer, however, is this :

If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents
That's somewhat. And you'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself when you return Him thanks !

Awareness of beauty in this world makes us give thanks to God who is responsible for it; beauty is one of God's finest gifts. And in any case, this world is not to be despised; it is a world full of wonder and delight, and all the things we love in it help to draw us to the God who made them. The particular function of art, too, is an important one. Art does not improve on God's creations ; what it does is to draw our attention to important things that we might otherwise have missed :

For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see...

It is right to enjoy this world, it is right to love God because he created it. Religion and morality are well served by a right appreciation of the good things in this world :

...This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank - it means intensely, and means good
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

This is the central thought of the poem. The world is good because God made it good. In recognising its goodness, we recognise the hand of God. The artist helps in this process of recognition because he constantly looks for the beauty that is the evidence of the hand of God in the world and his work makes the rest of as aware of greatness and glory of God **(Mark Roberts).**

Fra Lippo is one of the most delightful poems Browning ever wrote: the frank sensuality of the painter-monk, his ribaldry, his impudence, his description at the end of the poem of the mischievous painting he is going to do (a religious painting with himself in it) all these things give to the central idea the flesh and blood that Lippo, and Browning himself, were so keen on. The result is a richly human portrait, which at the same time tells us much that is of the greatest importance for our understanding of Browning's views on art.

Further, it is not only Browning's views on art that we find in this poem. We also get his views about life, too, and the doctrine of love. "In fact, Browning's ideas about all these subjects hang together, and here as elsewhere he is unable to speak about one of these topics without in some degree implying his ideas about all the others. This is one of the things that people mean when they call Browning a philosophical poet; his work arises out of what people sometimes call a 'world-view' —a conception, that is to say, which embraces all our life, in a way which, so far as possible, is coherent and unified". **(Mark Roberts)**

As regards the style of the poem, it is remarkably free from the usual obscurities of Browning. His meaning is quite clear, despite a few allusions, and references to the art and artists of Italy. Besides this, Lippo's account of his life and doings is frequently enlivened by flashes of humour There are a number of interesting and suggestive similes in the monologue. For example, humour is created by the use of a quaint simile when Lippo tells the watchmen that he occasionally resorts to fooleries in order to find relief from the strain of having to paint devotional pictures :

The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.

We get an equally interesting simile when Lippi describes himself shuffling sideways with his blushing face 'under the cover of a hundred wings thrown' :

Like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hot-head husband.

The simile is richly suggestive, as it brings out the full sensuality of Fra Lippo. He must bring in sex even when talking on a devotional subject.

In short, "the poem is admirable for its undercurrent of humour, its impressionistic descriptions, its imaginative insight into the complex character of the friar-artist, and for certain lines that have the unescapable ring of great poetry, like the following, which sum up in noble words the theme of the poem :"

The beauty and the wonder and the power
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises, and God made them all !

Lines 1-20

Fra--friar, a monk.

You need not clap...face—Friar Lippo asks the watchmen not to throw the light of their torches directly on his face, as it dazzles his eyes and causes great pain to him. They are throwing the light directly on his face because they want to identify him.

Zooks– an oath. *What is to blame* ? - what wrong have I done, that you regard me with such suspicion and treat me so rudely.

Alley—a narrow lane. The lane in question, where brother Lippo had been roaming about so late in the night, was frequented by prostitutes. Hence the doubt and surprise of the watchmen. What should a monk be doing there at such a late hour ?

Where sportive...ajar Women of loose character leave their doors wide open so that their customers may come in. *Sportive ladies* – a polite and humorous way of referring to women of loose character. The epithet shows brother Lippo's sense of humour.

The Carmine is my cloister Lippo was brought up at the monastery called Carmine. *Cloister*– monastery. *Hunt it up*– find out where it is situated and ascertain whether I belong to it or not.

Harry out - Hurry up. *Zeal* enthusiasm in arresting all those who are out of the monastery till late in the night.

Rat monks are being compared to rats who stray into wrong holes, *i.e.* go out pleasure-seeking and enter into the homes of prostitutes. *Haps on his wrong hole* goes out to a prostitute.

Nep- catch ; arrest. *Softling*– a fair, delicate woman. *Wee white mouse*—a prostitute.

Weke, weke—the friar imitates the sound made by a rat as it creeps along.

Aha, you know your betters ?—have you now realised that my position as a monk is superior to yours ?

Then, you'll......on my throat- If you have by now realised that I am a monk, and so superior to you in my rank, then please take away your hand from my throat. The use of the word 'fiddling' again shows Lippo's sense of humour. *And please to know me likewise* —and be pleased to treat me according to my rank.

Master...the Medici - Cosmio of the Medici was born in 1389 and died in 1464. He was a Florentine who returned from exile to make himself astutely master of the whole state, which he ruled absolutely, though not nominally so, until his death in 1464. He was a merchant, banker, statesman and a generous patron of art and letters, and after his death was not undeservedly called the father of the country.

Caps the Corner- towers high over other houses at the corner of the street.

Boh !– an exclamation of contempt and annoyance. *You were best* – it would be best for you to treat me with due courtsey.

The day you're hanged– you are sure to be hanged for treating me so rudely. *How you affected...gripe* ! When you are punished for this offence, then remember to tell me how you dared to catch hold of my throat so rudely and powerfully. *Gullet*—throat. *Gripe* – hold.

Lines 21-39

It concerns you—it is in your interest. The words are addressed to the head-watchman. *Pick up a manner*– behave more courteously. *Nor discredit you* –if they do not learn manners, it will bring disgrace to you, you would be blamed for it.

Pilchards—a kind of fish, considered of no value at all; worthless fish.

Judas– he was one of the twelve disciples of Christ. He betrayed Christ to his enemies for a handful of silver, and hence Judas has come to mean a treacherous person. *To a title* in every detail, in every one of his features.

He's Judas...such a face - Judas had exactly such a face. The words are addressed to one of the watchmen. The remark brings out that Lippo has the eye of a painter. He at once realises that the face of the watchman would be of great service to him, if ever he has to paint Judas.

You make amends –As your face would be of great help to me in painting Judas, I consider it sufficient compensation for all your rudeness.

Hangdogs insulting followers or sub-ordinates. The words are addressed to the head-watchman.

Quarter-florin a small coin of Italy.

Munificent generous. *House* the family of Cosimo of the Medici with whom Lippo was staying. *That harbours me*—where I am putting up.

All's come square again - I am no longer angry with you ; we are friendly once again.

With the pike and lantern in those days watchman carried pikes and lanterns when on duty. *Pike* halberd, a sort of spear. *I'd like his face* his face closely resembles that of the slave who holds John the Baptist's head, and so I like it. It would help me in my painting.

The slave that holds - The slave of King Herod is often indicated in medieval pictures holding the head of the executed John, the Baptist, with blood dripping out of his head.

A-dangle by the hair– To hang loosely by the hair.

John Baptist's – John the Baptist, is so called because he was the first to administer baptism. He was killed by Herod owing to the malice of his queen Herodias. Her daughter Salome (step-daughter of King Herod) with her dancing charmed Herod and as reward asked that the head of John, the Baptist, be presented to her on a plate. John was killed accordingly, and the head brought to the Queen on a plate.

'Look you, now,' as who should say –as if the slave in the picture is proud of what he has done, and expects others to praise him.

Yet unwiped with blood still dripping from it. Brother Lippo has the imagination of a born artist.

It's not your chance – or the like ? - do you happen to have a piece of chalk or coal with you ? If so, I would at once draw the portrait of the watchman and show you how well he serves as a model for the slave in the picture mentioned above.

Style - call. *Yes, I'm......me so* this is obviously in reply to the question of the watchman, if he was a painter.

Lines 40-69

What, brother Lippo's......and they take you ?—You must certainly have heard of the feats of one brother Lippo, and the stories you have heard of his doings, must have fascinated you. I am the same monk Lippo. *Take you* fascinate you.

Like enough it is quite possible that you are fascinated by the stories of my escapades.

I saw the......your eye—I have noticed that you have fine sense of humour, one who is likely to be interested in my story.

Set things straight now—settle matters; come to an understanding. *Hip to haunch* be friendly and intimate with each other.

Here's spring come · it is spring season. *The nights one...the town* in such nights one goes out in groups and wanders through the streets singing. *Sing out carnival*—In Italy it was the fashion to go round in gay bands, singing joyous songs. It was called the carnival season, before the season of fasting in Lent. Now carnival means any season of revelry or merry-making.

Mew - place of confinement, here the house where he was living. *A-painting*—constantly painting, one picture after another, and all the pictures were those of saints.

A sweep of lute-strings – music being played upon the lute, a stringed musical instrument.

Whifts of songs – snatches of song.

Flower o' the broom......and so on · There are several such flower songs in the poem (*Flower o' the broom, Flower o' the thyne Flower o' the rose* ; *Flower o' the clove*, etc. etc). These flower-songs are of the variety known as the '*stornelli*'. The peasants of Tuscany sing such songs at their work, and as one peasant ends a song, another continues it with a fresh one, and so they go on competing with each other. These "*stornelli*" consist of three lines each. The first usually contains the name of a flower, while the next two introduce the love-theme. The 'stornelli' belong to the class of folk-songs.

Three slim shapes—Brother Lippo saw three delicate, slim girls going along. *And a face that looked up*—one of the girls looked up, and Lippo was charmed by her.

Flesh and blood......made of I am a man, made of flesh and blood, and not an angel or a god. I was tempted by that girl. I could not control my passions.

Lines 70-105

Into shreds it went · it was all torn into pieces. *Curtain and counterpane......was a ladder* curtain, bed-sheets etc., were torn and tied together to form a ladder, and with its help he came down through the window. *Scrambling somehow* - getting down with great difficulty.

I come up with the fun—Brother Lippo chased and soon overtook the three girls.

Hard by Saint Laurence—near the Church of St. Laurence, one of the oldest churches of Italy. The Medici were buried in it.

Hail fellow, well met—it was a happy meeting, and I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

Go to work begin painting the picture of. *On Jerome...subdue the flesh*—Lippo had been painting a portrait of St. Jerome, revealing his asceticism and self-inflicted penance. St. Jerome was born about 331 A.D. and died in 420 A.D. He was one of the most learned of the Fathers of the Christian Church and the author of many commentaries on the holy scriptures. St. Jerome was represented in Lippo's picture as beating himself with a stone and thus inflicting pain on the flesh in order to be free from temptations.

You snap me of the sudden—The watch came suddenly and arrested Fra Lippo while he was returning to his home.

You shake your head - to show your disapproval, for I am a monk and so I should not give way to such temptations. *Mine is shaved*—monks were clean-shaven, and so could easily be recognised as monks. *The sting is in that* - it is my being a monk which causes offence. Well, I am not a monk of my own free will, but because of necessity. Circumstances compelled me to become a monk. He then proceeds to narrate his life-story.

If Master Cosimo......the word naturally if you had discovered such an important personality as Cosimo of the Medici in the same circumstances in which you have arrested me, you would have kept silent and allowed him to go. *But a monk*—but in a monk you consider such an escapade as a serious offence, and so do not let me go.

Come, what I am a beast for?—You consider me a beastly person, but listen to my story and then you would realise that the fault does not lie with me.

Shucks husks.

The wind doubled......I went the wind filled up in my empty stomach, I suffered from acute pain, and fell down unconscious.

Trussed me caught hold of me.

Its fellow was......as I knew—with her other hand, she gave me stinging blows.

By the straight cut—by the shortest route. *Munching* - eating, chewing.

Minded determined. *Refection time* it was refreshment time and so the "good, fat father' himself was hungry, so his mouth watered and he had to wipe it.

The mouthful of bread—Lippo's sense of humour is to be noted.

Trash I was told that all worldly wealth and property, such as is possessed by the Medici, is mere trash, worthless and of no value at all. The words are ironical.

I'was not for nothing - it was good that I renounced the world, for in the monastery I could lead a comfortable life.

The good bellyful I got enough of good food to satisfy my hunger. *Warm serge* - woollen clothes to protect me from cold. *The rope that goes all round*—it is the rope which is worn round his gown by a monk.

Lines 106-142

Not overmuch their way - I was not very useful as far as religion is concerned ; I was not much inclined that way.

Such a to-do ! they had great difficulty in curbing my animal spirits, and make a monk of me.

Latin in pure waste - their efforts to teach me the Latin language were all useless. They failed to teach it to me. *Construe* - know ; translate. '*Amo*' - a Latin word meaning 'I love'.

Fortune—misfortune.

Processional and fine well-dressed and walking out in a procession. *Sacrament* a holy, religious ceremony.

The droppings of the wax—In Catholic churches where many candles are used, the wax drippings (or droppings) are carefully collected by poor boys who then sell the wax and thus earn a lot.

Holla call loudly. *The Eight*—The eight magistrates who ruled over Florence. Call the police and have him punished, so to say.

Offal rubbish. *Admonitious* suffering. *Hunger-pinch*—acute suffering caused by hunger.

He learns the look......hunger-pinch - The senses of a person who suffers from hunger and cold, as he suffered, are sharpened. He can discriminate between one face and another. His powers of observation and his memory are developed. The experiences he had as a poor, destitute boy made him an expert painter.

Remarks observations, experiences. *Turned to use*– made good use of as a painter.

Scrawled - sketched.

Antiphonary's - a book of antiphone, *i.e.* sentences sung by one choir in response to another. This was the service-book of the Catholic Church, composed by Gregory, the Great. *Merge*–margin.

Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes—transformed the music notes into the semblance of a man, by adding arms and legs. A note in musical notation is written as a line with a little circle at the top, such a note can be easily turned into a human shape, by adding arms and legs.

. *Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's*– transformed the letters of the alphabet into human faces by adding eyes and noses to their shapes.

Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun–sketched the scene from various facets of life while studying Latin Grammar, with its nouns and verbs.

The monks looked black—The monks were very angry.

Prior the head-monk. *In no wise* - not at all ; by no means. *Lose a crow and catch a lark*—he may not make a good monk, but he would certainly make a good artist. So we would keep him in the monastery. He would be our artist.

Our man of parts—our artist.

We Carmelites The Prior belonged to the Carmelite monastery. There were both monks and friars among the Carmelites.

Camaldolese –Members of a religious order founded by St. Romuald at Camalodi, near Florence in 1012.

And Preaching Friars The Dominicans, or Black Friars, who were distinguished for their eloquence. The order was founded by St. Dominic and recognised by Pope Innocent III in 1216.

Do our church up fine decorate our church by his paintings.

And put the front on it that ought to be–make the front of the church as magnificent as it ought to be.

Daub Paint.

Lines 143-171

Crammed full of ideas. *Blank*- without any decoration.

Prompt disemburdening—quickly he painted on the walls, and thus unburdened his mind of the load of ideas.

The black and white–The colours of the robes which are worn by the monks. The Carmelites put on white frocks and thus the Carmelite friars were known as White Friars. The Dominicians were known as the Black Friars and the Franciscans as Gray Ftairs.

Old gossips—old people. *Cribs* bits of food, etc. *Barrel-droppings* dropped from the barrels in which fish and other kinds of food were carried. *Candle-end* burnt out bits of candles. Such were the sins poor old people were guilty of, and they were represented by Lippo as coming to the priest to confess them.

To the breathless fellow...his beard and half - In the Middle Ages, the monasteries gave asylum to criminals and protected them from the law. The guilty used to become monks and so evade the forces of the law.

Signing himself with the other because of Christ– pointing to the Cross as a token of his submission to Christ.

Whose sad face...the passion of a thousand years—The image of Christ on the Cross looked very melancholy to the criminal. Christ's countenance was so sad on account of the fact that after more than a thousand years of Christianity men should be still hardened enough to commit murders.

Till some poor girl...and so was gone - Evidently a poor peasant girl unfortunately in love with the murderer. She comes in the dusk of the evening, covering her head with her apron. She comes on tip-toe and drops a loaf into the hand of the murderer, some petty trinklets to be turned into money for his flight, and some flowers. The murderer with a growl, takes the things offered. The poor girl in silence prays for his safety, and leaves the church. It is a touching scene, and Lippo painted it on the walls of the monastery.

Covered bit—the part of the wall covered with paintings.

Till checked till they were stopped by the head-monk.

It is the life—the portraits were life-like. So they were praised by the monks.

Lines 172-197

My triumphs strew...funked Lippo's happiness and sense of triumph soon ended in smoke, like a fire made out of straw.

Pulled a face—frowned on seeing the paintings.

Quite from entirely different from ; entirely opposed to. *The mark of*—the true qualities of.

Like the true exactly as they are in life, and so not at all idealised. True art does not present reality, but an idealised picture of reality. *As pea and pea*—as one pea resembles another.

Show - external appearance or beauty.

Homage to the perishable clay– glorification of the body which is mortal.

But life them...it all true art should paint the soul, and not the body. The body should be ignored.

Man's soul......a new-born babe - The prior himself is not able to describe what the human soul is like. He likens it first to fire, then to smoke, then to vapour, only the vapour assumes the form of a new-born babe.

Shows soul—is necessary to express the soul.

Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God Here is a painting by Giotto of a saint praising God. The effect of this picture is to make the beholder praise God likewise. Why not imitate the art of Giotto.

Giotto Giotto di Bondone was born in 1276 and died in 1337. He was a famous Italian painter and a great friend of Dante.

Herodias, I would say....all out – Reference is to the beheading of John the Baptist. John the Baptist had rebuked King Herod for having married his brother's wife Herodias. Herodias got John the Baptist thrown into prison. Subsequently, she managed to have John beheaded. We are told in *the Bible* : "But when Herod's birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias (Salome) danced before them, and pleased Herod. Whereupon he promised upon an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, 'Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger'. And the king was sorry : nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her. And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison. And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel ; and she brought it to her mother."

It is to be noted that it was not Herodias, as Browning tells us, but her daughter, who danced in the Biblical story. *Have it all out*—rub out all these portraits.

Lines 198-220

And can't fare worse— to much greater advantage. *A fine way, etc* - The words are ironical.

Thus, yellow does...black – those who consider the soul all in all would, perhaps, like the painter to use wrong colours and thus paint a very ugly picture, indeed. Perhaps, they think that such a picture would express the soul better. *And any sort...intense* – it is supposed that in this way the portrait would acquire intensity of feeling. *All besides itself* the details of the body ; everything except the soul. *Means and looks nought* is meaningless, and not at all like reality.

In the entire passage Lippo's plea is for realism in painting.

Why can't a painter......both in their order As in walking both legs should be used, so it is desirable that in painting body and soul go together. In other words, to ask a painter to paint the soul only is as ridiculous as to ask him to walk on one leg only.

Patron-saint she stands for the patron-saint of the monastery. *If it means etc* if it expresses the emotions of (the words are ironical). *Won't beauty go with these* Is it not possible to combine beauty with emotion ? (Certainly it is).

Can't I take...then three-fold? Is it not possible to make a picture beautiful and true to life, and then add to it soul or the expression of emotion etc. ? Certainly this is possible, and in this way the beauty of the picture is much heightened.

Put the case the same let us suppose so for the sake of argument.

Nought else - without the expression of emotion.

You get about......invents—Lippo cannot conceive of Beauty without Soul—but even if you have Beauty without the soul (though it is impossible) that in itself is no mean thing, since it is an expression of the beauty created by God.

That's somewhat—even such a painting is of great value.

And you'll find......him thanks—one should be grateful to God, for the beautiful forms both of man and nature, which he has created. In this way one can find one's own soul, one should not search for 'soul' in art, but in one's own self.

Lines 221-270

'Rub all out'—they ordered me to rub out the painting I had done, and I did so. *There's......short* that in brief is the story of my life.

I've broken bounds—I have often crossed limits, and violated all rules and regulations which should govern the conduct of monks.

Having a friend the reference is to Cosimo Medici with whom Lippo often lodged.

Lord, it's fast holding......or tie up a horse—The allusion is to the large metal rings, fixed to the front of a house for tying up the horses of visitors or putting up a flag on festival days. For Lippo they were the means by which he could climb down from above for his night's adventures, and then also climb up.

And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes are peeping the education which was imparted to him is rooted in his mind.

The heads shake still—The old moks still move before his mind's eyes, as if they were expressing their disapproval of his work.

It's art's decline......great and old The aged monks seem to tell him that his art is decadent and that he will never be classed among the great masters of art.

Brother Angelico's · Fra Angelico was also called Guido di Pietri. He was a great Italian painter of the Middle Ages. Later on he became a Dominican monk in 1407. His purpose was to excite devotional feelings by his sketches.

Brother Lorenzo He was born in 1370 and died in 1425. He was called 'Il Monaco'. He was also a devotional painter.

Stands his single peer is the only painter who can equal him.

Fag on flash if you go on painting merely the body, you will never be able to equal the great painters mentioned above. *Fag*—means to work laboriously.

You keep your......mine—you keep to your own ideas of art, and I will stick to mine.

They must know the words are ironical. How can the monks know who is the greatest artist and what is the best way of painting ?

They with their Latin - the monks, whose business it is to preach religion in the Latin language.

Doing most—When I am hard at work.

A turn a diversion. *The business of the world* - the pleasures of the world diverted the attention of Lippo from the painting.

Death for us all,......for each death is sure to come and each man should enjoy himself according to his bent while he is passing through this life.

And my whole soul revolves—Fra Lippo hears the song. His soul at once rebels. *The cup runs over* - His mind overflows with thoughts of worldly pleasures.

The world and life's too long to pass for a dream - The pleasures of the world cannot be regarded as a mere dream.

Grass- grass here stands for the pleasures of life. Should a man enjoy the pleasures of life or not ? Lippo wants that this conflict between enjoyment of life and its renunciation as preached by the monks should be resolved once for all.

You tell too many......detestable—Lippo is here condemning religious and moral hypocrisy. The church-dignitaries tell lies about what they like and what they do not like. *If given you at your word*- if God were to grant it to you at your prayer. *You find...detestable*—which you pretent to hate.

I always see......man's wife - even religion has taught him the lesson of sensuous pleasures. He has learnt from *the Bible* that God placed Adam in the garden of Eden and gave him Eve for sexual pleasure. So in this world also a man should follow the example of Adam and enjoy himself

Lines 271-320

Slouches and stares- observes attentively. *Lets no atom drop* — nothing escapes his eye.

Guidi— Tomasso Guidi, nick named 'Hulking Tom', was born in 1301. He was a Florentine painter. Browning makes him learn his art at the Carmelite convent under Lippo.

Picks my practice up - He follows my methods.

This fair town's face - the natural beauty of this city.

There are the frame to the objects of nature, like the river, mountains etc., which form the background to human activity.

What's it all about......wondered at? - beauty whether of nature or of man is the creation of God. Hence it is to be enjoyed and appreciated, and not to be despised.

This last, of course—you will say, certainly, the beauty created by God is to be wondered at.

Careless what comes of it—without caring either for the criticism or the appreciation of others.

To let a truth slip - if some detail or aspect of reality escapes the eye of the painter. *Beat her* excel nature.

Lending our minds out - the painter, by his skill heightens the interest and beauty of the shapes and objects painted by him. In this way our attention is captured by the painting, though the reality might have failed to attract us. Thus even the realistic painter performs very valuable service.

The entire passage is expressive of Browning's own views on art. He was in favour of realism in painting.

Your cullion's hanging face - the villainous look on the face of your subordinate.

How much more......God to all of you - Fra Lippo Lippi remarks that the nobler figures sketched realistically, will be more effective than the Prior's sermons from the pulpit. "Here again Browning insists on the high function of art, which elevates the moral and spiritual stature of those who see noble works of art, thus performing a religious function."

Blot something disgraceful ; something evil.

Blank— devoid of all significance

To find its meaning is my meat and drink— the purpose of my life is to understand the real significance and value of God's creation, and then to interpret it to others through my art.

So by your art. *Instigate to prayer* move others to pray ; inspire devotion in the hearts of those who appreciate your paintings. *Matins* - morning prayers.

Lines 336-377

An idle word - a frivolous word, not suitable for a monk. *Huff* - annoyance ; anger. *Wot*—knows. *Turns* intoxicates.

Apt word to excuse himself ready to excuse himself for his misconduct.

Plot—plan.

Something in Sant Ambrogio's—A new picture in the convent church of St. Ambrogio which he is going to paint.

Sant - Italian for saint.

St. Ambrogio - St. Ambrose.

A cast of my office – A piece of my art.

God in the midst......and her babe he will paint God in the middle of a group of saints, along with Virgin Mary and baby Christ.

Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood - Moreover, the picture will be surrounded by a troop of angels, overhanging the central figures, like a bower of flowers.

Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet—the dresses of the angels would be decorated with lilies.

As puff on puff......to church at midsummer—Sweet as the perfume exhaled by fashionable ladies at church in midsummer.

Orris-root a kind of iris, the dried root of which is used in perfumery.

St. John—he will put St. John in front of his picture because he is the patron saint of Florence. St. John, is John the Baptist.

Saint Ambrose – he will also include Saint Ambrose (Ambrogio) in his picture because he is the patron saint of the particular convent of nuns and keeps a record of the friends and benefactors of the convent and blesses them with a long life.

And Job......Painters who need his patience - he will also include Job in his picture, a very model of patience. He is particularly needed by painters who must have great patience. Job is a Biblical hero. He had to go through many trials and tribulations which he suffered with such patience that his name has become proverbial for patience. Students must note the pun on "Uz" the city to which Job belonged and "Us". Of "Us" means belonging to us, the painters as a class.

Well, all these......who but Lippo—When all the saints have been introduced in the picture in their devotional attitudes, Lippo will suddenly introduce himself into it. He will come out from some corner of the picture, like a person suddenly appearing out of the dark into light and noise and music.

Moon struck—almost mad with astonishment.

This pure company—in the company of angels and holy saints. Lippo imagines that he has introduced himself into the picture, and thus has become a part of the holy company of angels and saints.

Where's a hole...escape- confused and perplexed, Lippo searches for a way of escape from the presence of the holy company of which he is unworthy. This is all his imagination.

Sweet angelic slip of a thing—a sweet little female angel.

Addresses the celestial presence the female angel talks to the saints and angels in the picture.

He made......you - it is Lippo who has painted you. He is your creator, so to say.

His camel-hair......painting-brush - was it possible for him to paint with a brush made out of the hair of his camel-hair dress. *Camel-hair* shirts were rough and coarse and were worn by the devout to mortify the flesh.

Iste perfecit opus it is he alone who could paint such a perfect work. The words are supposed to have been spoken by the female angel. Lippo is highly imaginative, and now his imagination is at work.

Lines 377-392

Kirtles- petticoats. *Play hot cockles*—indulge in love-making with the wife of another person. *Pops* enters suddenly. *Hothead*—angry. *Thrown like a......hothead husband* Lippo cannot get rid of sexuality even when he talks on an essentially religious subject.

Scuttle off move on to (in the picture which Lippo imagines he would paint). *The little lily thing* the sweet female angel who had spoken so well of Lippo. *In the nick* - Just at the right time.

Like the Prior's niece - The female angel would be portrayed like St. Lucy, whom Lippo had painted after the Prior's niece, and for this he had been blamed so much.

The grey beginning—the dawn.

The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church

(*a*) The Poem

ROME, 15—

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews—sons mine...ah God, I know not! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
'Do I live, am I dead?' Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:

Peach-blossomed marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse,
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone;
Put me where I may look at him ! True peach,
Rosy and flawless : how I earned the prize !
Draw close : that conflagration of my church
—What then ? So much was saved if aught were missed !
My sons, ye would not be my death ? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find......Ah God, I know not, I !...
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast......
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst !
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years :
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he ?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons ? Black—
'Twas ever antique-black I meant ! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath ?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and prechance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off
And Moses with the tables, but I know
Ye mark me not ! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm ? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at !
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then !
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.
My bath must needs be left behind, alas !
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs ?
—That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—

Tully, my masters ? Ulpian serves his need !
And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke !
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work :
And as you tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet.
—Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend ?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best !
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons ! Else I give the Pope
My villas ! Will ye ever eat my heart ?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
'Do I live, am I dead ?' There, leave me, there !
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it ! Stone—
Gritstone, a-crumble ! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
And no more *lapis* to delight the world !
Well go ! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row : and, going, turn your backs
—Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was !

(*b*) Introduction and Appreciation—Critical Summary

The Poem : Its Publication

The poem was first published in **Hood's Magazine** in 1845, and the same year in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*. Then in 1863, it was published in *Men and Women*. Saint Praxed's church is an old church in Rome, and the poem was inspired by Browning's visit to this church early in October, 1844. Saint Praxeds was the daughter of a Roman Senator in the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius in the second century A.D. The poem has a renaissance setting and the dying Bishop, who is the central personage in it, is as imaginary Bishop, typical of the sensuous, art-loving, and luxurious Bishops of the age.

A Dramatic Monologue—Critical Summary

The poem is one of the finest dramatic monologues of Browning. The speaker throughout is the dying Bishop, and his sons and nephews constitute the group of listeners. They do not speak even a single word, but we know of their reactions from the Bishop's own comments. Like other dramatic monologues of Browning, it is a penetrating psychological study of the emotions that welter in the mind and soul of the dying Bishop. Every line which he utters reveals some one facet or the other of his character.

The poem opens with the dying Bishop calling his sons and nephews round his bed to tell them of his last wish. First, he moralises about the vanity of human life. All human aspirations are vain, and they come to nothing. His wife, their mother, was a beautiful woman and Bishop Gandolf, his rival, envied him for having won her love and married her. But now she was dead, and he himself lay dying at the moment. Every one dies and all human loves and jealousies end in death. This shows that life on this earth is unreal and unsubstantial like a dream. Next, the Bishop refers to the peaceful atmosphere of the church of Saint Praxeds, and then comes to the question of a suitable tomb for himself, a question which is uppermost in his mind at the time.

He had selected a fine corner in the church for his tomb. But his rival, Bishop Gandolf, cheated him and took the corner for his own tomb. The Bishop curses his rival for this. As for himself, he has secured another corner. This corner may not be quite as spacious, but it commands a good view. From there one can see the pulpit on the epistle-side, a part of the choir, some of the seats, and the church-dome carved with angels. In this corner, a sunbeam is sure to lighten his grave now and then. There his dead body would be buried in a tomb made of basalt, and over it there would be a decorated canopy. The canopy would have nine pillars, four on each side, and one at his feet, where his son Anselm stands at the time. He wishes that his canopy should be all made of rare, costly marble, as red in colour as red wine. He is happy in the

thought that he would have a tomb of the costliest stone, while his rival has a tomb only of a white and yellow stone of a cheap variety.

The Bishop fears that his sons would not carry out his wishes and would not give him the gorgeous tomb he desires. So he tempts them saying that he is leaving to them all his villas, including that villa in the village named Frascati, a gorgeous villa which has such magnificent baths in it. In return, he asks from them a very little service. They should go to his vineyard and dig there at a particular place where once stood an oil-press. There in a basket of rushes covered with rotten fig leaves, they would find a lump of *lapis-lazuli* (a precious blue-stone). This lump is as big as a Jew's head, and as blue as a blue vein on the breast of Virgin Mary, in one of her portraits. They should place this stone over his tomb at the place where his knees would be. There it would look like the globe of blue stone which the figure of God carries in his hands in the brightly decorated Jesu Church where they go for worship. His rival Gandolf would look at it from his grave, and he would burst with envy. This thought is comforting to this worldly-minded Bishop.

For a moment, the dying Bishop again philosophises over the shortness of human life. Years pass by swiftly, as swiftly as a weaver's shuttle being thrown this way and that way. Then man dies and is buried, and none knows what happens to him after that. Then he again returns to the subject of his tomb. Earlier he had said that basalt should be used for the slab of his tomb. Now he modifies himself a little and says that, instead of basalt, antique-black, a costlier kind of black stone, should be used. This would provide a fine contrast to the decorative border below the slab. They should remember that they have already promised to give his tomb a bronze statue for a background. They should keep their promise. The Bishop is dying, his mental powers have grown weak, and there is much incoherence and confusion in his talk. He desires both Christian and pagan decorations for his tomb. He would like his tomb to be carved with figures of Christ preaching his *Sermon on the Mount*, of Saint Praxed in all her glory, and Moses holding in his hands a diary with the *Ten Commandments* inscribed on it. But he would also like to have on his tomb pagan carvings, Tripod, Thyrsus, Nymphs, and Pans. He would even like a carving showing a Pan ready to snatch away the garment of a nymph in order to feast his eyes on her naked beauty and to make love to her. This brings out the sensual nature of the Bishop.

The Bishop feels that his sons are not listening to him. He asks his beloved son Anselm what they are whispering in his ears. Perhaps they hope to enjoy and indulge in merry-making with the wealth that he is leaving for them, while he himself would lie in a tomb of some cheap, worthless stone, fit for the grave of a beggar. His rival Gandolf would look at him from his tomb, and laugh and mock at him. The very thought is intolerable to him.

However, the very next moment he hopes that his sons love him, and that they would make for him a tomb of Jasper (a costly stone of green colour) as they have already promised. If they do not keep their promise, his soul would grieve that he has left behind his gorgeous baths for them. He wants that at least one block of his tomb should be made of Jasper, as green as pistachio-nut. There is no shortage of Jasper, it can be found in abundance in the world. In return, he would pray to saint Praxed to give them horses, brown Greek manuscripts, and women with limbs as white as marble. But he would do so only if they carve his epitaph correctly in Latin, with words and phrases carefully selected. He would like the phrases to be carefully selected from the works of Tully or Cicero, the famous orator, and not from those of Ulpian who was a much inferior writer. The gaudy phrases of Ulpian may satisfy Gandolf, but he must have epitaph in the choicest Latin of Tully.

If his sons construct for him the grand tomb he desires, then he would lie in his grave peacefully for centuries to come. Lying in his grave, he would listen to some Roman Catholic priest performing the mass ceremony and muttering the prayers in a low tone. He will also witness the various other Roman Catholic ceremonies being performed in the church. He will see the candle burning steadily, and inhale the intoxication smoke of the incense burning in the church.

As the end is near, the Bishop grows delirious. His heated brain makes him see himself as the effigy on his grave. He imagines himself standing on his grave with his hands folded, as if round his staff. Then he imagines his bed clothes to be the funeral pal, or shroud wrapped round his limbs, which falls down to the ground, as he stretches forth his legs. He imagines, next, that the candle is dying out and he hears certain vague sounds speaking to him about his life on this earth, and also about his previous lives. Sometimes, this vague murmuring sound tells him of Popes, Cardinals and Priests, and at other times it seems to be the sound of St. Praxed preaching on the Mount. St. Praxed was a virgin, but the Bishop imagines her to be a man. *The Sermon on the Mount* was delivered by Christ, but to the dying Bishop it seems that it was delivered by St. Praxed. The delirious Bishop sees his dead wife with her pale face and speaking eyes, imagines that his remains have been kept in beautiful urns made of rare, agate stone, and that the language carved on his tomb is pure and appropriate. He mocks and jeers at the Latin epitaph carved on the tomb of his rival Bishop. One of the words used, "*Elucescebat*", meaning, "*he shone forth*", is wrong. It has been used by Ulpian. Therefore, he does not want the Latin of Ulpian. He wants the pure and correct Latin of Cicero.

The dying Bishop is conscious of the fact, that his brief life on this earth has not been a worthy one. He has been guilty of much that was wicked and evil. Still he does not care for matters spiritual; he is more concerned with the construction of a proper, grand

tomb for his earthly remains. He asks his sons to promise that they would make his tomb all of *lapis lazuli.* If they do not promise to do so, he would give all his villas to the Pope. Their ingratitude has always caused him great grief. The glitter in their eyes reminds the Bishop of the bright eyes of their mother, his wife. This glitter seems to suck out his very soul, it shows that they are waiting eagerly for his death. The very next moment his heated imagination makes him think that his sons would add to the simple decoration of his grave, and thus heighten its effect. Perhaps, they would show the vase filled with grapes, cover the faces of the figures on the decorative border with a mask, and add square pillars with the bust of Terminus, the Roman God of boundaries, on them. Perhaps, they would tie some cat-like creature to the decorative altar, which, struggling for its freedom, would be represented as throwing down the wand carried by Bacchus, the wine-god. In this way they would try to comfort his soul, as he lies in his grave.

But the very next moment he notices the look of ingratitude in their eyes, which causes him great pain, and he angrily asks them to leave him. They do not care for him, rather they wish him dead so that they may inherit his property. Perhaps, they would execute his grave in an unworthy manner. They would insult him by giving him a tomb made of ordinary old, and decaying sand stone. The stone-squares used for his tomb would be damp and moist, as if by the oozing out of the sweat of the corpse lying beneath. They would not use *lapiz lazuli* which delights the world. Angrily he asks them to go away, but still he blesses them. He asks them to reduce the number of candles, and place them in a row. As they leave him, they should go respectfully with their backs turned, like a clergy leaving the altar. They should leave him alone there, to die peacefully in that church of peace. During his last moments, he would like to be alone to watch undisturbed the effigy of old Gandolf over his tomb of onion-stone. He would like to make sure whether his rival still mocked at him, for having married their mother. She was so beautiful.

As a Psychological Study

The monologue has been highly admired by a number of critics. **E.T. Young** admires it for its penetrating study of the psychology of the dying Bishop. He writes, "the poem is a penetrating study of the emotions which welter in the Bishop's mind, now that his natural forces are too enfeebled to restrain them. Two by their constant recurrence give the clue to his life and character; *first* the life long envy of his ancient rival Gandolf; *second*, his consuming desire for a monument, splendid in design and rich in ornament. Round these cluster the passions and thoughts excited by suspicion of the intentions of his sons, whom he vainly attempts to bribe with sensual and epicurean delights; by the tacit confession of broken vows; by the memories of thefts committed to adorn his tomb; by his gloating triumph over the slip-shod Latin of Gandolf's

epitaph : by the soothing sense of the quiet incense-laden air of the "Church for peace" *All these diverse elements are composed into a consistent picture which reveals not simply the pagan humanistic Bishop, but at the same time the fundamental characteristics of an epoch.* The sensuous worldly-minded Bishop does not think of the salvation of his soul, nor of God, nor of life in the world to come, but is concerned with the construction of a suitable tomb for himself, splendid and richly ornamented." He is suspicious of his sons, knows that they will not carry out his wishes, and, so cunningly seeks to tempt them and to bribe them. His sensuality is seen in the line where he speaks of a Pan, "*ready to twitch the nymphs last garment off*", or where he refers to, "*mistresses with great smooth marble limbs*". Even at the moment of death, his jealousy and hatred for his rival Bishop Gandolf keeps breaking out. In short, every line reveals that the Bishop is greedy, petty-minded and worldly.

The Bishop : A Satirical Sketch

However, it must not be supposed that all the Renaissance Bishops were like this Bishop. There were many who were devout and religious in the true sense of the word. Rather the Bishop in the poem is a satire on a particular type. **Berdoe** sums up the whole issue in the following words : "There were Bishops like the Bishop of St. Praxed's such as the poet has so intimtably sketched for us ; but had there been no others of a more Christian type, religion in southern Europe would have died out instead of starting up as a giant refreshed to win, as it did, the world for Christ. The worldly Bishop of the poem is an "art for art's sake" ecclesiastic, who is not at all anxious to leave a life which he has found very satisfactory for a future state about which he has neither anxiety nor concern. What he is concerned for is his tomb. His old rival Gandolf has deprived him of the position in the church which he longed for as a resting-place, but hopes to make up for the loss by a more tasteful and costly monument, with a more classical inscription than his. This old fellow is as much Pagan as Christian, and his ornaments have as much to do with the gods and goddesses of old Rome as with the church of which he is a minister. "*In all this Mr. Browning finely satirises the Renaissance spirit, which, though it did good service to humanity in a thousand ways, was much more concerned with flesh than spirit*".

The Renaissance Note

Besides being a penetrating character-study, the poem is also remarkable for having captured the very spirit of the Renaissance. It reveals at every step Browning's knowledge of Renaissance art and Renaissance history, both secular and religious. It is steeped in the Renaissance spirit, its love of colour, pomp and show, its love of horses, Greek manuscripts, and beautiful women, its greed and sensuality. **Ruskin** awards it high praise for its realistic presentation of

the very spirit of 16th century ɪ .ly, "Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages—always vital, right, and profound: so that in the matter of art, with which we are specially concerned, there is hardly a principle connected with the mediaeval temper that he has not struck upon in these seemingly careless and too rugged lines of his...I know no other piece of modern English prose or poetry in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I have said, of the central Renaissance, in thirty pages of the *Stones of Venice*, put into as many lines, Browning's also being the antecedent work."

(c) ANNOTATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

Lines 1—15. Vanity, saith......this tomb of mine.

A dying Bishop calls his sons and nephews around his bed as he wants to tell them of his last wish. He begins by telling them that life is a vanity. All human aspirations are vain and they come to nothing. His wife, their mother, was a beautiful woman and Bishop Gandolf, his rival, envied him for having won her love and married her. But now she was dead, and he himself lay dying at the moment. Every one dies, and all human loves and jealousies end in death. This shows that life on this earth is unreal and unsubstantial like a dream. Having dwelt on the vanity of human life, the Bishop refers to the peaceful atmosphere of the church of Saint Praxed, and then comes to the question of a suitable tomb for himself, a question which is uppermost in his mind at the time.

St. Praxed—Praxed was the daughter of a Roman senator in the reign of Emperor Antoninus Pius. She used all her riches in relieving the poor and the needy. She was martyred and achieved sainthood. A church in Rome bears the name of this saint.

Vanity......vanity—religious teachers teach us that human life is nothing but vanity. All human aspirations are vain, and come to nothing. All human ambitions, rivalries, loves and hatreds, end in death.

Draw round my bed—the Bishop asks his sons and nephews to stand round his bed, so that he may talk to them.

Anselm—the name of one of his sons. *Old Gandolf*—the name of the Bishop who was his rival in love, and who envied him for having married such a beautiful woman as their mother was.

I am Bishop since—He was not a Bishop during the life time of their mother. He became a Bishop after her death.

And thence you may perceive—the fact that all die shows that. *The world is a dream*—life on this earth is as unreal and unsubstantial as a dream.

Life, how and what is it ?—What is the meaning and purpose of life ? This is the eternal question which all have asked, but which none has been able to answer. Life still remains a mystery.

Dying by degrees—dying slowly. *In the dead night*—at midnight, when all is silent and quiet. *Peace, peace seems all*—there is perfect calm and quiet.

Saint Praxed......for peace—according to the Bishop, the Church of Saint Praxed is well-known for its peaceful atmosphere.

And so,, about this tomb of mine—now the Bishop comes to the point. He is very particular about his tomb. Even at the moment of death, he does not care for matters spiritual.

Lines 15—35 : I fought with tooth......were missed.

The dying Bishop had selected a fine corner in the church for his tomb. But his rival, Bishop Gandolf, cheated him and took the corner for his own tomb. The Bishop curses his rival for this. As for himself, he has secured another corner. This corner may not be quite as spacious but it commands a good view. From this corner, one can see the pulpit on the epistle-side, a part of the choir, some of the seats, and the church-dome carved with angels. In this corner, a sunbeam is sure to lighten his grave now and then. There his dead body would be buried in his tomb made of basalt, and over it there would be a decorated canopy. The canopy would have nine pillars, four on each side, and one at his feet where his son Anselm stands at the time. He wishes that the canopy over his tomb should be all made of rare, costly marble as red in colour as red wine, strong and effective. He is happy in the thought that he would have a tomb of the costliest stone, while his rival has a tomb only of a white and yellow stone of cheap variety.

Fought with tooth and nail—the Bishop tried his best. *Niche*—the corner in the church of St. Praxed which he had selected for his tomb.

Cozened—cheated ; deceived. *Shrewd was that snatch*—Gandolf snatched the corner from the Bishop in a very cunning manner. *He graced his carrion with*—there in that corner his dead body is buried. *Carrion*—dead flesh. *God curse the same*—the Bishop curses his rival.

My niche—the corner which he has now obtained *Cramped*—narrow. *Epistle-side*—the south side of a church. *Somewhat*—*i.e.* a part of. *The choir*—the place in the church where the group of singers sits. *Aery dome*—the hollow dome of the church. *Where live the angels*—on which are carved the figures of angels.

A sunbeam is sure to lurk—occasionally a ray of sunlight is sure to lighten his tomb.

Slab—piece of stone, here the tomb. *Basalt*—black marble, very rare and costly. *My tabernacle*—the decorated canopy over his

tomb. *Columns*—pillars supporting the canopy. *Two and two*—four on each side of his grave. *The odd one—i.e.*, the ninth pillar.

Peach-blossom marble all—the marble used for the canopy would be red like peach blossom. *The rare*—of a rare variety. *Of a mighty pulse*—strong in its effect (the sensuous nature of the Bishop is to be noted). *Paltry*—cheap ; worthless ; of no value at all. *Onion-stone*—a cheap kind of marble, white and green in colour.

Flawless—perfect ; exquisite. *How I earned the prize*—the Bishop got the corner for his tomb after a hard and difficult struggle. *Draw close*—he asks his sons to come nearer. *Conflagration*—burning. *If aught were missed*—if something was lost.

Lines 36—50.

The Bishop fears that his sons would not carry out his wishes, and would not give him the gorgeous tomb he desires. So he tempts, them saying that he is leaving to them all his villas, including the villa in the village named Frascati, a gorgeous villa which has such magnificent baths in it. In return, he asks from them a very little service. They should go to his vineyard and dig there at a particular place where once stood an oil-press. There in a basket of rushes covered with rotten fig-leaves they would find a lump of *lapis lazuli*. This lump is as big as a Jew's head, and as blue as a blue vein on the breast of Virgin Mary, in one of her portraits. They should place this stone over his tomb at the place where his knees would be. There it would look like the globe of blue stone which the figure of God carries in His hands in the brightly decorated Jesu church where they go for worship. His rival Gandolf would look at it from his grave, and he would burst with envy. (The very thought is comforting to this worldly-minded Bishop.)

Bedded—concealed ; hidden. *Corded up*—fastened with strings, *Olivefrail*—a basket made of rushes. *Lapis lazuli*—a precious blue stone. *Madonna*—a portrait of Virgin Mary. *Brave*—gorgeous, *Frascati*—the name of a village near Rome.

Like God.........His hands—in the Jesu church in Rome, the altar is adorned with the Trinity. In the hands of God is the globe of blue stone to which the Bishop refers, and to which he likens the lump of *Lapis lazuli* which is to decorate his grave.

Burst—his heart would break into pieces with jealousy.

Lines 51—79. Swift as a weaver's shuttle......serves his need.

For a moment, the dying Bishop philosophises over the shortness of human life. Years pass by swiftly, as swiftly as a weaver's shuttle being thrown this way and that way. Then man dies and is buried, and none knows what happens to him after that. Then he again returns to the subject of his tomb. Earlier he had said that basalt should be used for the slab of his tomb. Now he modifies himself a little and says that, instead of basalt, antique-black, a costlier kind of

black stone, should be used. This would provide a fine contrast to the decorative border below the slab. They should remember that they have already promised to give his tomb a bronze statue for a background. They should keep their promise. The Bishop is dying, his mental powers have grown weak, and there is much incoherence and confusion in his talk. He desires both Christian and pagan decorations for his tomb. He would like his tomb to be carved with figures of Christ preaching his *Sermon on the Mount*, of Saint Praxed in all her glory, and Moses holding in his hands a diary with *Ten Commandments* inscribed on it. But he would also like to have on his tomb pagan carvings showing a tripod, Thyrsus, Nymphs, and Pans. He would even like a carving showing a Pan ready to snatch away the garment of a nymph in order to feast his eyes on her naked beauty and to make love to her.

The Bishop feels that his sons are not listening to him. He asks his beloved son Anselm what they are whispering in his ears. Perhaps they hope to enjoy and indulge in merry-making with the wealth that he is leaving for them, while he himself would lie in a tomb of some cheap, worthless stone, fit for the grave of a beggar. His rival Gandolf would look at him from his tomb, and laugh and mock at him. The very thought is intolerable to the Bishop.

The very next moment the Bishop hopes that his sons love him and they would make for him a tomb of Jasper (a costly stone of green colour) as they have already promised. If they do not keep their promise, his soul would grieve that he has left behind his gorgeous baths for them. He wants that at least one block of his tomb should be made of Jasper as green as pistachio-nut. There is no shortage of Jasper, it can be found in abundance in the world. In return he would pray to saint Praxed to give them horses, brown Greek manuscripts, and women with limbs as white as marble. But he would do so only if they carve his epitaph correctly in Latin, with words and phrases carefully selected. He would like the phrases to be carefully selected from the works of Tully or Cicero, the famous orator, and not from those of Ulpian who was a much inferior writer. The gaudy phrases of Ulpian may satisfy Gandolf, but he must have his epitaph in the choicest Latin of Tully.

Basalt—a black marble. *Antiqu-black*—a black marble, rarer and costlier. *Contrast*—provide a suitable contrast. *Frieze*—the decorative broder beneath the slab of the tomb. *Bas-relief*—a statue which would form the background to the tomb. *Bronze*—a metal compounded out of brass and copper.

Pans—forest-gods in classical mythology. *Nymphs*—beautiful goddesses of rivers and oceans in ancient mythology. *Tripod*—the bronze altar in the temple of Apollo in ancient Greece. *Thyrsus*—the staff carried by Bacchus, the god of wine. *The Saviour......mount*—the figure of Christ delivering his famous sermon, called, "*the Sermon*

on the Mount". *Praxed*—the daughter of a Roman senator who gave away all her wealth in charity. *Twitch*—snatch. *Tables*—tablet or diary.

To revel down my villas—to waste all my wealth in revelry and merry-making. *Bricked over*—entombed in. *Mouldy*—decaying. *Travertine*—a common stone, of no value at all, fit for the grave of a beggar. *Chuckles at*—laughs and jeers.

Jasper—a rare stone, green in colour. *Ye stand pledged to*—You have already promised to give me a tomb of Jasper. *Lest I grieve*—otherwise, his soul would feel sad. It would remain restless and dissatisfied.

And have I not.........pray—the Bishop promises that when in heaven he would pray to saint Praxed to grant them the gifts they so much desire. *Mistresses*—beloveds. *Marble limbs*—limbs as white and smooth as marble.

Aright—in the most correct and appropriate language. *Tully's every word*—Marcus Tullius Cicero, the model of Latin prose for all writers of the Renaissance ; the Bishop demands the most scholarly Latin for his epitaph.

Ulpian—A great Roman jurist and the chief adviser to the Emperor Alexander Severus. He was murdered by soldiers in 228 A.D. He belongs to the Silver Age of Latin prose, using words and forms for which no warrant could be found in the writers of the Augustan period. *No gaudy ware*—high sounding, bombastic, but otherwise worthless and inaccurate Latin prose of Ulpian, such as is used for the epitaph of his rival. *Epitaph*—the words inscribed on a tomb.

Lines 80-100

If his sons construct for him the grand tomb he desires, then he would lie in his grave peacefully for centuries to come. Lying in his grave, he would listen to some Roman Catholic priest performing the mass ceremony and muttering the prayers in a low tone. He will also witness the various other Roman Catholic ceremonies being performed in the church. He will see the candle burning steadily, and inhale the intoxicating smoke of the incense burning in the church. As the end is near, the Bishop grows delirious. His heated brain makes him see himself as the effigy on his grave with his hands folded, as if round his staff. Then he imagines his bedclothes to be the funeral pal or shroud wrapped round his limbs, which falls down to the ground, as he stretches forth his legs. He imagines, next, that the candle is dying out, and he hears certain vague sounds speaking to him about his life on this earth, and also about his previous lives. Sometimes, this vague murmuring sound tells him of Popes, Cardinals and Priests, and at other times it seems to be the sound of St. Praxed preaching on the Mount (St. Praxed was a virgin, but the Bishop imagines her to be a man. *The Sermon on the Mount* was delivered

by Christ, but to the dying Bishop it seems that it was delivered by St. Praxed). The delirious Bishop sees his dead wife with her pale face and speaking eyes, imagines that his remains have been kept in beautiful urns made of rare, agate stone, and that the language carved on his tomb is pure and appropriate. He mocks and jeers at the Latin epitaph carved on the tomb of his rival Gandolf. One of the words used, "*Elucescebat*" meaning, "he shone forth", is wrong. It has been used by Ulpian. Therefore, he does not want the Latin of Ulpian. He wants the pure and correct Latin of Cicero.

The blessed mutter—the prayer of the blessed Mass ceremony being uttered in a low tone by some Roman Catholic clergy. *Mass*—a Roman Catholic ceremony. *And see...day long*—the reference is to another Roman Catholic ceremony.

Stupifying—intoxicating. *I fold my arms, etc*—the dying Bishop is growing delirious. He imagines himself to be the statue or effigy standing on the tomb of his dreams. *Crook*—the staff carried by a Bishop, as the symbol of his holy office.

Mortcloth—shroud ; funeral Pall. *Laps and folds of sculptor's work*—the dress worn by a statue.

Certain humming—some vague, indistinct voice speaking to him. *Agate*—a rare, costly stone. *Urns*—small ornamented pots or vases used by the ancient Greeks to keep the ashes of their dead.

Marble's language—the epitaph carved on the marble of his tomb. *Discreet*—appropriate. *Elucescebat*—Latin, meaning, "he shone forth". *Tully*—Cicero, the greatest of the masters of Latin prose. *Ulpian*—a writer inferior to Cicero. It is his prose, inaccurate and inappropriate, which has been used for the epitaph of Gandolf. The dying Bishop wants only the pure prose of Cicero.

Lines 101-125

The dying Bishop is conscious of the fact that his brief life on this earth has not been a worthy one. He has been guilty of much that is wicked and evil. Still he does not care for matters spiritual ; he is more concerned with the construction of a proper, grand tomb for his earthly remains. He asks his sons to promise that they would make his tomb all of *Lapis lazuli*. If they do not promise to do so he would give all his villas to the Pope. Their ingratitude has always caused him great grief. The glitter in their eyes reminds the Bishop of the bright eyes of their mother, his wife. This glitter seems to suck out his very soul ; it shows that they are waiting eagerly for his death. The very next moment his heated imagination makes him think that his sons would add to the simple decoration of his grave, and thus heighten its effect. Perhaps, they would show the vase filled with grapes, cover the faces of the figures on the decorative border with a mask, and add square pillars with the bust of Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries, on them. Perhaps, they would tie some cat-like

creature to the decorative altar, which struggling for its freedom would be represented as throwing down the wand carried by Bacchus, the wine-god. In this way, they would try to comfort his soul, as he lies in his grave.

But the very next moment he notices the look of ingratitude in their eyes, which causes him great pain, and he angrily asks them to leave him. They do not care for him, rather they wish him dead so that they may inherit his property. Perhaps, they would execute his grave in an unworthy manner. They would insult him by giving him a tomb made of ordinary old and decaying sand stone. The stone-squares used for his tomb would be damp and moist, as if by the oozing out of the sweat of the corpse lying beneath. They would not use *lapis lazuli* which delights the world. Angrily he asks them to go away, but still he blesses them. He asks them to reduce the number of candles, and place them in a row. As they leave him, they should go respectfully with their back turned, like a clergy leaving the altar. They should leave him alone there, to die peacefully in that Church of peace. During his last moments, he would like to be alone, to watch undisturbed the effigy of old Gandolf over his tomb of onion-stone. He would like to make sure whether his rival still mocked at him, for having married their mother. She was so beautiful.

Pilgrimage—life on this earth. *Will ye......heart*—cause me great pain by your ingratitude. *As a lizard's quick*—sharp and glittering, like the eyes of a lizard.

Heighten—add to ; beautiful. *Impoverished*—poor ; simple. *Frieze*—the decorative border. *Piece out*—add to. *Starved*—simple ; poor. *Vizor*—mask ; a covering for the face. *Term*—a pillar with the bust of Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries, on it. *Tripod*—the altar in the temple of Apollo, in ancient Greece. *Lynx*—a cat-like creature. *His struggle*—its efforts to free itself. *Thyrsus*—the wand carried by Bacchus, the wine-god. *Entablature*—tomb.

Stabbed me—caused me great pain ; wounded me as with a dagger. *Gritstone*—ordinary, cheap sand-stone. *A-crumble*—old and decaying. *Clammy squares*—damp, square pieces of stone. *They keep*—which is buried in them. *Departing altar-ministrants*—clergy leaving the altar in a Roman Catholic church. *Onion-stone*—an inferior stone, red and white in colour.

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